SelfSame

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By

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The body is a place of violence. Wolf teeth, amputated hands. Cover yourself with a cloak of leaves, a coat of a thousand furs, a paper dress. The dark forest has a code. The witch sometimes dispenses advice, sometimes eats you for dinner, sometimes turns your brother to stone.

You will become a canary in a castle, but you'll learn plenty of songs. Little girl, watch out for old women and young men. If you don't stay in your tower you're bound for trouble. This too is code. Your body is the tower you long to escape,

And all the rotted fruit your babies. The bones in the forest your memories. The little birds bring you berries. The pebbles on the trail glow ghostly white.

"Introduction to the Body in Fairy Tales," poem by Jeannine Hall Gailey

The legend [of twins] intimately has less to do with science or medicine than with the oracular powers of twins who, together, appear to tell us most of what we want to know about being uniquely human and, apart, more than we want to know about feeling alone.

"Vanishing Twins," in *The Culture of the Copy*, by Hillel Schwartz

1. Introduction

In the last few years I've been interested in images and stories of duplicated or multiplied bodies. My interest in doubles is primarily rooted in personal experience: that of growing up with an identical twin sister. Of course, twins and multiple siblings are not perfectly identical to the nail, the hair, the tooth. Despite our similarities, small differences are present: my sister's fingernails, for example, are narrower than mine; I have more white hair than she; and dental interference has altered our teeth in different ways. Yet 'identical' twins have *similar* bodies: bodies that provoke a strangeness in their similarity and despite their very real individuality. Images of identical bodies, such as twins, evoke a strange aesthetic— the image transcends simple representation and approaches the symbolic and metaphoric. The stories we tell about fully twinned bodies—factual and fictional— establish suggestive concepts of a compound self, the instability of identity, and questions of our distinctness as individuals.[1]

Much of the work I've created during the process of my graduate degree is based on childhood memories and the knowledge of growing up with a double, an almost-identical sibling. And yet, to indicate the images I have composed and produced are autobiographical would, in a way, be wrong. They are akin to a mythology of memories: based in my own experience and, to a greater degree, influenced by research into cultural and social practice. Such images are memory focused, but naturally susceptible to distancing and personal bias. Influence from popular culture, film, mythology, and research of twins and doubles have affected my work. The visual dreamscape present in this series of work is imagined through fiction as much as it is

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[1] Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (NY: Zone Books, 1996), 20.

remembered from childhood. The work in my thesis exhibition, *SelfSame*, personalizes my relationship to 'twinness' not only through personal experience but also in how stories of doubles complicate selfhood and identity. This work is influenced and supported by research in mythology, film, literature and biology. Hundreds of years of cultural material is swollen with stories of vanishing twins, compound selves, and malevolent impostors—made real in the flesh of our doubled other. Conceptions of the double vary across cultures and through time; however a consistent thread of uncanny atmosphere and discomfort follows twins, clones, and doppelgängers. Psychoanalytic works such as Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" and Otto Rank's "Der Doppelgänger" equate the double with the belief in the soul and a fear of death. Despite the negative associations of the double as an impostor or a ghoulish figure of tragedy or death, the double also seems to promise a companionship and wholeness that acts as a curative to the individual's sense of loneliness. By interacting with our double we are not only fulfilling a need for an understanding companionship—a pressure already made manifest in the desire for monogamous coupling and marriage—but also locating a kind of perfect *self-reflection*. Being a twin and having a twin sister has not, I think, given me any great insight into who I am as an individual. Of course, my twin and I are separate individuals: we do not reflect *each other*. In order to make use of such reflection, one would need to meet their exact double: yet the desire for companionship and understanding of oneself popularizes twins as special relationships, emphasizing closeness, friendship, and unified identities.

2. The Female Grotesque

During my undergraduate degree I produced a series of watercolours that presented the body as amorphous, leaking, and tumorous (see figures 1 and 2). Though I did not intend to gender the figures I was drawing and painting, many people assumed that the bodies were female.

Figures 1 and 2: *Somatic: Possess* (4x6 ft) and *Soma VI* (8x11 inches) by Maia Stark, ink and watercolour on Stonehenge, 2011

The visual references to weight, leaking, tumours, disappearance and softness in my watercolour pieces all seemed to be associated with a female coded body. During the first year of the graduate program, I began to research the idea of a repulsive female body further. I am, through gender studies courses as well as through my lived experience, familiar with the idea that women are often trivialized or denigrated for their bodies: aesthetically as well as biologically. In Western culture, for example, women are expected to look a certain way: thin, white-skinned, with classical western features—when women do not look like this they are considered inferior,

even less intelligent or less valuable. Media outlets are more concerned about Hillary Clinton's hairstyle than her policies, for example.[2] Women are also accused of being emotional and untrustworthy during their menstrual cycles, 'pigeon-holed' as caretakers,[3] and are legally denied rights to choices about their reproductive organs. I have personally encountered many jokes about my emotional and incapable ovaries, as well as experiencing various types of public shame about my body. The value and relevance of female coded bodies seems to be inextricably tied to the body: value is determined by women's image and capability is complicated by society's view that women are tied to their biological functions—menstruation or the capability to menstruate being particularly shamed as 'grotesque.'

In order to discuss the concept of the female grotesque, I'd like to first examine the origins of the word 'grotesque' and how its use in everyday language began to reflect social and cultural inequalities. Etymologically, 'grotesque' refers to a genre of decoration: specifically, to a decorative painting or sculpture: a light, gay and "beautiful style of ornament practiced by the ancient Romans."[4] Mary Russo notes that retrievals of Roman culture during the Italian renaissance, while representing one of the most significant examples of the grotesque aesthetic

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[2] Martha Moore, "Focus on Hillary Clinton's Appearance Sparks Criticism," *USA* Today, last modified May 10, 2012. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-05-09/hillary-rodham-clinton/54860282/1.

[3] Terry Pedwell, "Peter MacKay Suggests Women Are Too Busy Bonding With Kids To Be Judges," *Huffington Post Canada,* last modified August 19 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/06/19/peter-mackay-women-judges-kids-bonding_n_5511967.html. Canadian Justice Minister Peter MacKay has recently been criticized for suggesting that the lack of female judges is due to women being afraid of the job taking them away from their children. This comment not only assumes that all women focus on having a family, but ignores other factors which limit the diversity of the federal court, such as systemic sexism and racism.

[4] Oxford University Press, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v."grotesque," http://www.oed.com.

rediscovered, cannot be take as a singular event in which the origin of the 'grotesque' is first discovered:[5]

> Art historians have identified many examples of drawings and objects in the grotto-esque style which predate both classical and renaissance Rome. The category of the grotesque, as such, emerged only later in the renewed interest in aesthetic treatises such as Vetruvius' *De Architectura* (ca. 27 B.C.), which linked the classical style with the natural order and, in contrast, pointed to the grotesque as a repository of unnatural, frivolous, and irrational connections between things which nature and classical art kept scrupulously apart. It emerged, in other words, only in relation to the norms which it exceeded.[6]

Within a century of the Italian sixteenth century discovery and subsequent renewed interest of the decorative style, the term had spread to France and England, where "its definitive scope broadened from decorative motifs to encompass literature and even people."[7] In its current usage, the grotesque is an expression of what results from the transgression of norms:[8] therefore that which is 'grotesque' is positioned as 'frivolous'[9] and marginal within the dominant narrative— this is suggestive of certain societal constructions, such as constructions which designate the female and feminine as inferior.[10] If we consider the word 'grotesque' in the 18th and 19th centuries, we can see many examples of the grotesque entering a specifically gendered language as well as being used to denigrate the lower classes. The Oxford English Dictionary

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[5] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 3.

[6] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 3.

[7] Inga Kim Diederich, "Grotesque," *The Chicago School of Media Theory* (blog), Winter 2008, http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/grotesque/.

[8] Ibid.,

[9] Ibid.,

[10] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 5.

includes, in its extensive list of definitions, the following examples of use: "A woman with her head peeping out of a sack, could hardly…make a more Grotesque figure" (1747)[11] and "You can conceive nothing more grotesque than the Sunday trim of the poor people" (1863).[12] Both of these examples imply a sort of spectacle or offensive public presence. The narrator of the second quotation, F.A Kemble, describes how she found it offensive to gaze upon the grotesque sight of the poor people in their Sunday best.[13] Further exploration of the source reveals that Kemble is discussing the church wear of the black slaves on her family's plantation.[14] This is important to note, as the grotesque body is not a concept exclusively associated with gender or class, but is projected onto other oppressed groups. The contemporary use of 'grotesque' has become inseparable from ideas of the offensive, unruly and repugnant body— all related to power dynamics between gender, race, class and physical ability.

In her much referenced book, *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo describes the image of the classical body and its comparative differences from the grotesque body:

> The images of the grotesque body are precisely those which are abjected from bodily cannons of classical aesthetics. The classical body… is monumental, closed, static, symmetrical, and sleek; it is identified with the "high"… culture of the renaissance and later, with … rationalism [and] individualism . . . The [classical] grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, *multiple*, and changing; it is identified with non-official "low culture" or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation.[15]

The grotesque body is described as distinctly *of* the body: human bodies secrete and change, we sweat and age and lose hair. The classical body, on the other hand, seems to transcend the

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[11] Oxford University Press, s.v."grotesque."
[12] Ibid.,

[13] F.A Kemble, "Miss Kemble's Georgia" *The Spectator Archive,* published May 30, 1863, http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/30th-may-1863/22/miss-kembles-georgia.

[14] Ibid.,

[15] Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 8.

physical and material body. Michelle Hirschorn describes the concept of a mind/body split in Western philosophy, citing Plato and Descartes's influential theories in which the human body "confused and obscured all rational thought."[16] Descartes sought to create an absolute distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal, the goal being "complete transcendence of mind over body."[17] The human body, being earthly and grotesque, was seen to limit the mind. As feminist theorists Janet Price and Margit Shildrick describe, "the body seems to have been regarded always with suspicion as the site of unruly passions and appetites that might disrupt the pursuit of truth and knowledge."[18] This conception has traditionally established that only certain persons could engage in the pursuit of truth and knowledge: "By reconceptualizing the scientific mind, Descartes effectively shifted knowledge and reason away from the natural world (commonly associated with the feminine) and recast such characteristics as masculine attributes."[19] The ability to achieve transcendence and exercise rationality has been gender marked as an attribute of men alone—and further, as an attribute of specific and privileged men (white, upper-class, heterosexual); in this scenario, women remain "rooted within their bodies, held back by their supposedly natural biological processes."[20] Racism and sexism are found to be present in the scientific realm, and in the recent past certain scientific models prevented the granting of human

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[16] Michelle Hirschorn, "Orlan Artist in the Post-Human Age of Mechanical Reincarnation: Body as Ready (To Be Re-) Made," in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings,* ed. Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 2005), 152.

[17] Ibid.,

[18] Janet Price and Margit Shildrick, introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Body: a Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

[19] Hirschorn, "Orlan Arist," 152.

[20] Price and Shildrick, *Feminist Theory,* 2.

for many types of persons. Women, for example, weren't allowed to have access, or have limited access, to formalized education, and phrenology was a racist scientific practice that described character traits according to appearance.[21] Craniometry attempted to place black persons and Indigenous people with animals such as chimpanzees according to skull shape[22] —claiming that such people were less evolved and civilized than white persons with more classical features. There is an enduring association of the devalued, non-rational and earthly physicality with the feminine and female body,[23] the non-white body, the disabled body, and the homosexual body. Physical characteristics such as female genitalia, smaller skulls, darker skin, and disfigurement situate such persons in the category of the grotesque. Any person or act that is seen to be *of* the body (excrement, menstruation, sexual activity, sweat, hair, body modification, death) seems to be associated with the repulsive and *grotesque.*

It is, I think, important to note that male bodies can be grotesque as well—though I agree with Russo when she states that such bodies are necessarily coded as feminine in order to be considered grotesque.[24] Men whose gender performance do not conform to the normative heterosexual paradigm are also considered grotesque: for example, men who perform in drag; men who are sexually attracted to other men; effeminate men; and men whose actions do not conform to normative masculinity, such as men who cry in public. These bodies are grotesque

[21] "Scientific Racism," *Reduce the Burden* (blog), February 11, 2009, http://reducetheburden.org/scientific-racism/.

[22] Ibid.,

[23] Price and Shildrick, *Feminist Theory,* 2.

[24] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 13.

because they are aligned with feminine traits, and so "the grotesque can clearly be seen to be rooted in oppression of the *female* form."[25]

Doubled bodies, such as twins, take their place in the category of grotesque bodies. Russo makes mention of the grotesque double in her text, noting that "the redoubled and ghostly body takes up residence at the site of the maternal, threatening always to monstrously reproduce…[w]hat possible good could come from such grotesque repetition?"[26] Russo links the double to maternal reproduction, a fertility that monstrously reproduces and overwhelms. Female doubles, in particular, represent a potential re-reproduction, a grotesque repetition of the kind that Russo notes and Freud discusses in his essay "The Uncanny," where he states: "And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing— the repetition of the same features or character traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, even the same names through several consecutive generations."[27]

[25] Ibid., emphasis mine.

[26] Ibid., 186.

[27] Ibid.,

Figure 3: *Soma XXV* by Maia Stark, watercolour on Stonehenge, 8x11 inches, 2011

In the watercolours I completed during my undergraduate degree, the idea of replication and reproduction is insinuated in the tumourus masses which seem to drop off the figures. The piece *Soma XXV*, in particular, brings to mind the cellular reproduction of twins (see figure 3). Though I was not specifically focusing on twins or doubles at that point in my practice, I was nonetheless fascinated by the grotesque body, one in danger of performing 'monstrous reproduction,'[28] and created imagery around ideas of growth and bodily activity (such as cellular reproduction). When I began to investigate twins during my graduate studies, I mused with the idea of depicting twins who could be conjoined.

[28] Ibid.,

Figure 4: *Over, Done With, Gone* by Maia Stark, oil on canvas, 4x5 feet, 2014

In the piece *Over, Done With, Gone* (figure 4) the two girls depicted have a blurring of flesh between them, a suggestion of merging where their arms cross into each other. When painting this image I was conscious not to exoticize the very real struggles that people who are conjoined encounter— reality shows and tabloids do a well enough job without my participation.[29] My intention in merging and blurring the flesh between the two sisters is to offer a strangeness and un-reality to the scene that is otherwise quite grounded in the portraiture genre. As if posing for a snapshot both girls look to the audience, holding ferrets which are attended to by rabbits. This image is, in fact, based on a photograph of my sister and I, as well as a personal memory.

[29] "Abby and Brittany," *TLC*, http://www.tlc.com/tv-shows/abby-and-brittany. Abby and Brittany Hensel, twins conjoined such that they share a body, have starred in a reality show based on their life since 2012.

Figure 5: Maia and Cassandra, approximately 10 years of age.

Through based on a photograph, I altered the angle of view significantly in the painting, choosing (as I do in many of my paintings) to depict the figures larger than life. I mean to emphasize their presence and afford them some knowledge or power in their gaze directed at the audience. In merging the flesh between their arms, I hoped to insinuate a bond or connection between the two girls, leading the audience away from a straightforward portrait of sisters to a more imaginative— perhaps even darker—place. I've painted the girls older than they were in the photograph; they are, perhaps, more aware of themselves than the skinny prepubescent Maia and Cassandra in the photograph. Confident female-coded bodies are culturally associated with the grotesque,[30] and this association is furthered by the sisters' similarity to one another as well as the merging flesh between them.

The presence of animals further takes the scene out of a sense of reality. The connection between the twins seems to imply more than sisters sitting for a portrait: likewise, the animals are representative of much more. The presence of nature in much of my work is, I think, influenced by research into the female grotesque: the female body is often associated with nature

[30] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 14.

and with animals.[31] The original photograph inspired the presence of the ferrets. Ferrets are an unusual pet, and I find them to be much more feral and unpredictable than dogs or cats. The rabbits I've included seem to imply multiplicity and reproduction, as rabbits are well known to have a remarkable birthing capacity.[32] Rabbits are also known to exist in thresholds of transition, coming out of their burrows at dusk and dawn, periods between day and night.[33] Archetypal rabbits in stories are associated, due to their seemingly endless regeneration, as belonging to the realm of the eternal and thought to hold the key to immortality.[34] These associations are, I think, important to the reading of the painting, as I have been influenced by research into archetypal images and so the choices I have made in incorporating animals is not without reason. However, the presence of the rabbits and the insects (wasps and moths) in the foliage around the figures is also based on a childhood memory. My sister and I received two rabbits as a birthday present when we were young, perhaps seven years old. Though the person who sold my parents the rabbits assured them they had bought two female rabbits, this was incorrect. We had made a rabbit-pen out of chicken-wire next to the house, with little wooden boxes for the rabbits to hide in and lots of room to move around. Going out to the pen one morning, as I remember it, my sister and I were not greeted by our rabbits Sally and Sarah but found what seemed like dozens of dead, pink, baby rabbits. Wasps, attracted to the blood and smell of decay I suppose, swarmed over the tiny bodies. We thought perhaps that the mother or father rabbit had attacked the litter.

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[31] Hirschorn, "Orlan Artist," 152.

[32] "Rabbit/Hare," in *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images*, ed. Ami Ronnenberg and Kathleen Martin (Cologne, Germany: Taschen), 288.

[33] Ibid.,

[34] Ibid.,

It is a grotesque memory: one which brings to my mind nausea, revulsion, grief and fear. I became aware that rabbits have brutal claws and sharp teeth, and I no longer considered them such cute or innocent animals. Multiples and death are the motifs I associate with that memory— a memory of many identical dead animals— themes that present themselves in other pieces of my work.

The twins in the painting, *Over, Done With, Gone,* are, in my mind, not entirely individual or even indicative of real persons, despite being based on and inspired by a photograph. They are characters who form a unit; they do not exist outside of one another. Doubles such as conjoined twins are locatable as grotesque bodies within the narrative of the 'freak show,' in which many types of bodies are also coded as grotesque. To use such named stereotypes has, as Russo notes,[35] its drawbacks: I, again, hesitate to further exoticize certain bodies in the context of an academic paper. However, naming has its function when describing the types of bodies which, in being coded as grotesque and therefore are under-valued, have experienced particular oppressions. Alongside conjoined twins, we can add to the list of named grotesque bodies: the Medusa; the Crone or Witch; the Bearded Woman; the Fat Lady; the Tattooed Woman; the Unruly Woman; the Hottentot Venus (Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman); and the Female Impersonator.[36] The carnival travelling show operated on a fascination that seems prevalent across many cultures and through time. In his essay *On Tragic Art* (1792) Fredrick Schiller reflected "it is a general phenomenon of our nature that sad, terrible, even horrific things are irresistibly attractive to us; and that scenes of suffering and terror repel and attract us with equal

[35] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 14.

[36] Ibid.,

power."[37] This irresistible attraction to the grotesque, repulsive, strange and terrible filled the pockets of those who ran carnival 'freak shows,' and continues to hold sway in contemporary literature and film. Doubles such as twins, clones, and doppelgängers, have a particular place in the imagination of many as a grotesque and uncanny sight.

[37] Frederick Schiller, *"On Tragic Art*," (1792), quoted in Umberto Eco, *On Ugliness* (NY: Rizzoli International Publications, 2007), 282.

3. Doubles

Doubles—a blanket term I will use often in order to refer to not only twins, but also to various types of identical bodies, such as doppelgängers or clones—are pervasive in visual media as well as popular culture and mythology. When my interest in doubles became more research oriented, I began to look for examples of twins and—in a more generic sense— 'doubles' in art, literature, film, and in television. The unsettling atmosphere that an image of twins creates is, I think, due to the pervasive cultural material about twins and the concepts these stories imply, as well as the unnatural presence of identical faces—which can presume identical identities.

We tend to assume that a single face is representative of a single identity. Being able to recognize faces as different provides an early channel of communication in child development.[38] Face recognition also plays an important role in society, such that evolutionary psychologists have been interested in face recognition as a special ability which has been selected and preserved through evolutionary pressures.[39] The way one would recognize and differentiate most of the population—by faces—can, however, fail when confronted with identical twins. Twins have a likeness between them that can be unsettling. Being unable to distinguish between two persons is not only embarrassing or frustrating, but also prompts an uncomfortable sensation. Human faces, Dr. Anthony White declares, are "not supposed to be *completely identical*, unlike the product of the camera[.]"[40] While photography allows for the mechanical reproduction of a

[38] Charles A. Nelson, "The Development and Neural Bases of Face Recognition," *Infant and Child Development*, Volume 10, Issue 1-2 (2001): 3-18, doi: 10.1002/icd.239.

[39] Ibid.,

[40] Anthony White, "The Trouble with Twins Yoruba: Image and Ritual of the Yorube ère ìbejì," *Emaj Art Journal Online,* Issue 5 (2010): http://emajartjournal.com/past-issues/issue-5/, 1, emphasis mine.

face or body ad nauseam, human faces are constructed organically and individually and develop over time independently of another— and so to experience two (or more) identical faces is an abnormal thing. Images which achieve a disturbing likeness, such as artist Diane Arbus's *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967* (see figure 6) lead us to an experience of tension, as we try to negotiate the similarities we see first and the differences we then seek out.

Figure 6: *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967* by Diane Arbus, gelatine silver print 1967 (Art Institute of Chicago)

Of course it is worth noting that 'identical twins' are not identical. It used to be the case that identical twins were thought to be the same to the smallest detail.[41] However, as Allessandra Piontelli explains:

> . . . so called identical twins can. . . have discordant chromosomes. . . .During early separation [of the fertilized egg], for instance, chromosomal components can be lost, leading to . . . Chromosomal aberrations.. . Besides which chromosomal expression is also influenced by environmental components. Therefore not even identical [genetic material is] necessarily a guarantee of identical outcome. . . .Furthermore, with late

[41] Alessandra Piontelli, *Twins: From Fetus to Child* (London: Routledge Publishing, 2002), 21.

> splitting, in the period between conception and division, environmental components of various origin may intervene giving rise to further dissimilarities between the embryos.[42]

Changes in genetic material are common during embryonic growth: therefore, it is not possible for twins to be *completely* identical, and one could say that the term 'identical twin' is a misnomer. My sister and I are identical twins, and share very similar faces— however, her nose appears to be slightly longer than mine, and my jawline is a little bit wider. During my graduate work I thought about the idea that my sister and I were 'identical' when really we were very similar. I was interested in detailing exactly where our differences and similarities began and ended. One experiment created a compelling diptych (see figure 7).

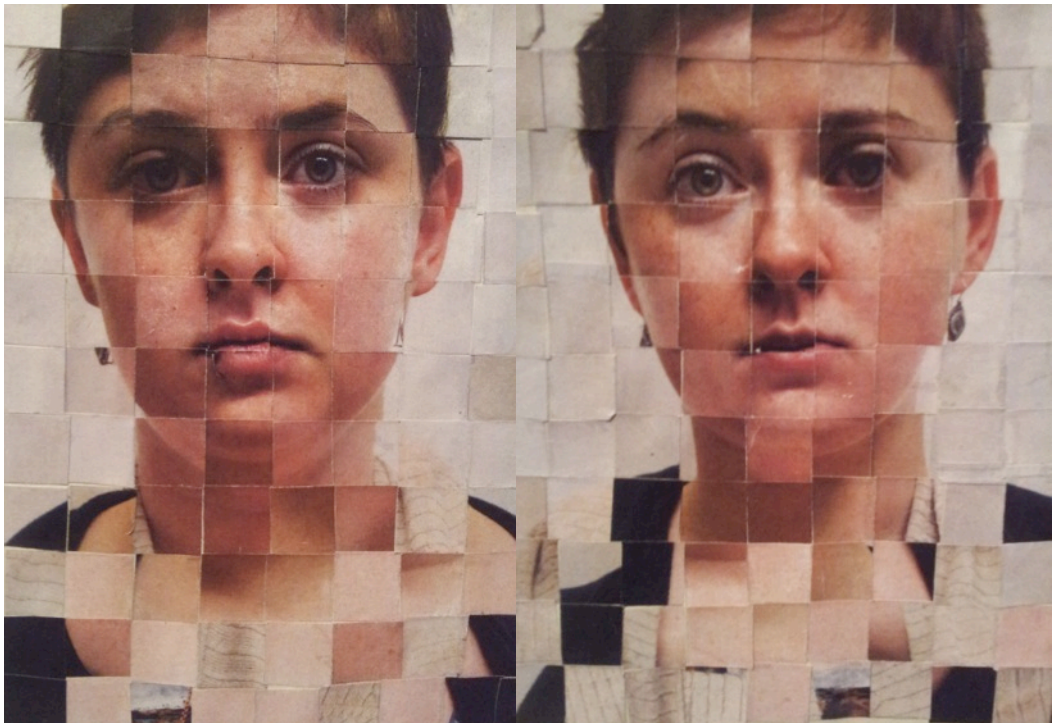


Figure 7: *Maia and Cassandra* by Maia Stark, digital photograph and collage, 8x10 inches, 2013

[42] Ibid.,

Gridding and cutting apart a photograph of both our faces, I replaced square slips of paper, one for one, between our images. The result is a portrait of my sister, which is 50 percent composed of my face, and a portrait of myself, which has 50 percent of my sister's face replaced with my own. The portraits are, in fact, not either of us. Strange and compelling spaces appear in the diptych when scrutinized carefully: a perfect alignment of cheek to chin, a disjointed matching of her earlobe to my ear cartilage. Our eyes, in particular, strike me as similar. The clue to knowing that they are not meant to match as one person's set of eyes, is that one twin's set of eyes look glassy due to a difference in lighting. In *The Culture of The Copy*, Hillel Schwartz states that the presence of an identical copy confronts us with "uncomfortable parts of ourselves—emotional, cultural, historical."[43] To see faces that are eerily similar brings to the surface stories and myths that have represented violent and unsavoury aspects of supernatural beings.

Horror movies and horror fiction alike make use of the idea of doubles, specifically, 'evil' twins. Stephen King's bestselling horror novel "The Dark Half" features a character who struggles with the violent desires of his other half— he is haunted by the "ghost of his pen name," George Stark.[44] This murderous ghoul is eventually revealed to be the psychic remnants of a long-lost twin who was absorbed in utero.[45] The popular cartoon "The Simpsons" dabbles with the trope of the evil twin when Bart discovers his twin in the attic. The episode reveals that Homer and Marge Simpson were told by their doctor that one of the twin boys born, conjoined at birth, was evil— and so after separating the twins they locked Hugo, the supposed evil twin, up

[43] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy,* 19.

[44] Shelly Barclay, " 'The Dark Half' by Stephen King," *Cracked Spines* (blog), http://www.crackedspines.com/2011/08/dark-half-by-stephen-king-book-review.html.

[45] Ibid.,

in the attic. The climax of the story transpires with the realization that Bart— *not* Hugo— is the evil twin. Reflection on Bart's trouble-making nature confirms this. Bart takes Hugo's place in the attic and Hugo takes his rightful seat as a treasured child.[46] The BBC's new critically acclaimed television series "Orphan Black" focuses on a woman who discovers other women who look exactly like her. At first Sarah, who was a foster child, thinks the other women are long lost triplet sisters until another 'sister' arrives and the truth is revealed: they are clones.[47] The fascination with twins in literature and in television extends to artwork. Similar to how stories of twins provoke ideas of unstable identities and malevolent impostors, the work of art which features identical or near-identical bodies provokes unsettling feelings of discomfort and even aversion.

Consider again the iconic work by Diane Arbus, *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967* (figure 6). This image represents real persons: sisters who were photographed in 1967. Yet the portrait is complicated by the seemingly unnatural presence of a second self. The twin sisters stand next to each other in identical dresses, in stockings and headband. The near perfect symmetry of their collars and posture is at odds with small differences between them (how their hair lies, the angle of their mouths). Despite small differences, they appear almost as one body, the distinction between their inside arms dark and indistinguishable by shadow until we reach their wrists, where their hands seem to touch. The image is well known for its psychologically dark and strange atmosphere: the visual impact of the image was even recycled by filmmaker and personal acquaintance of Diane Arbus, Stanley Kubrick, who recast the originally differently

[46] Matt Groening, *The Simpsons*, episode "Treehouse of Horror VII", directed by Mike Anderson (1996; Fox Television, October 27th 1996), television.

[47] John Fawcett and Graeme Manson, *Orphan Black* (2013; Temple Street Productions), television.

aged sisters in the screenplay for *The Shining* to be identical twins.[48] I imagine most people, whether or not they had seen Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* are familiar with the image of the Grady twins standing at the end of the hotel hallway, beseeching Danny Torrance to play with them, "forever... and ever... and ever."[49] Their grasped hands and identical dresses encourage a mesmerizing fascination and discomfort directly inspired by Arbus's photograph.[50]

Figure 8: The Grady Twins from Stanley Kubricks *The Shining,* 1980 (Entertainment Weekly)

Other artworks such as Théodore Chassériau's *The Two Sisters* (see figure 10) and Frida Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* (see figure 9) also feature doubles. Kahlo's figures represent different aspects of the artist herself: the double is used by the artist to symbolize an internal duality. Kahlo's use of doubling and portraiture signifies, as Salomon Grimberg states, the artist's

[48] "Stanley Kubrick," *Los Angeles County Museum of Art,* http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/stanley-kubrick. A photograph of the statement from the exhibition, though no longer on the website, can be found here: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-R7VguL-7SEY/UT4yTuo1JeI/AAAAAAAASxw/YIbSCrnGAT8/s1600/20130116_3217.JPG

[49] "The Shining (1980) Quotes," *IMDb.com*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081505/trivia?tab=qt&ref_=tt_trv_qu

[50] "Stanley Kubrick," *Los Angeles County Museum of Art* statement.

feelings of loneliness, "…incompleteness, fragmentation, and lack of integration."[51] Each Frida in the painting, heart vulnerable and bleeding from an exposed artery, looks at the audience and holds each other's hand. Despite representing opposing symbols of life and death, the figures hold a physical connection in their touch and through the shared artery. In the essay "Frida Kahlo: The Self as an End" Grimberg notes that the painting was created following Diego Rivera's request for a divorce and that Kahlo had told a friend "[one] Frida was kept alive by the love she received from Rivera; that the second Frida, the one on the left in a lace white dress, is dying since she is not loved by Rivera."[52]

Figure 9: *The Two Fridas* by Frida Kahlo, oil on canvas 1939 (Artnet)

[51] Grimberg, Salomon, "Frida Kahlo: The Self as an End," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick, 82-105 (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998), 97.

[52] Ibid., 97-98.

The dual nature of the painting is furthered by the choice of dress for each. One Frida is dressed traditionally as a Tehuana,[53] in recognition of Kahlo's Mexican identity, while the other Frida wears a European fashioned white dress, perhaps in recognition of her part Jewish-German ancestry. The two Fridas—despite designation of past and present, loved and unloved, life and death— are painted as though they exist at once. They hold hands and sit with knees angled to one another, as if sitting for a portrait. The two figures do not seem to simply represent a transition from one state to another, from past to present— rather, they indicate the multiplicity, flexibility, and complexity of identity. The two Fridas must exist with one another: the arteries connecting their hearts create a metaphorical conjoining of their bodies.

Figure 10: *The Two Sisters* by Theodore Chassériau, oil on canvas 1843 (oneyearonepaintingaday.blogspot)

[53] Ibid., 98

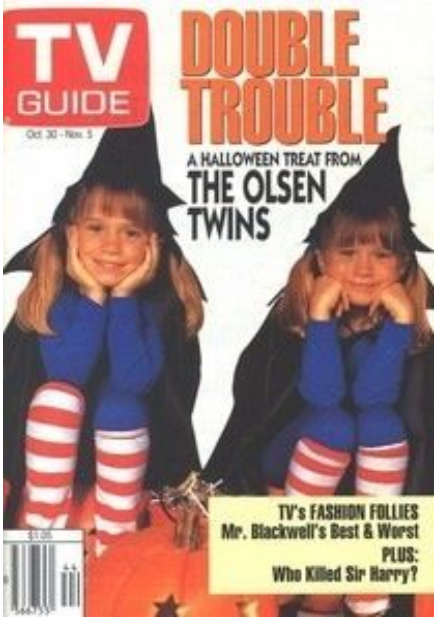
Théodore Chassériau's painting, *The Two Sisters* (figure 10), is not a double portrait of one person as in Kahlo's *The Two Fridas*. This painting is of two different people, sisters who share a striking similarity to each other— a similarity enhanced by identical dress, jewellery, and hair styling. The repetition of their arms moving across the body, one touching the other, encourages the connection between them—while at the same time subtly disrupting the sense of symmetry directed by dress necklines and the shine on their hair. The arterial ties of *The Two Fridas* and the physical touch and grasp of both Chassériau's *The Two Sisters* and Arbus's *Identical Twins* all imply a *physical connection* regardless of the intention of the images and the individuality of the models. This 'conjoining' present in these artworks as well as my painting *Over, Done With, Gone* (figure 4), implies a connection between the figures that seems to transcend biology. The portrayal of twins implies more than just representation of individuals. Rather, these ideas are bound to questions of identity and loneliness, as well as the superstitious and supernatural aspect of doubles in popular culture.

4. Sister, Sister

"How do you tell yourselves apart?"
-Dinner guest, 2010.

I remember interacting with the idea of doubles through popular media when I was a child. Friends of my sister's and I would collect VHS tapes of the many Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen movies, with titles such as "It Takes Two," "Double, Double, Toil and Trouble," and "Sister, Sister."[54] I can recall being fascinated watching interactions between twin sister characters. I was less interested when famous twin sisters Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen played the same character (as they did on the popular TV show *Full House* as Michelle Tanner). I couldn't tell who was pretending to be Michelle in the show, and so I was much less invested in her character. Perfectly identical pairs disinterested me. For example, occasionally my sister and I received the exact same Barbies as gifts— I specifically remember feeling somewhat uninspired when we played with the identical dolls. This type of doubled gift was, retrospectively, most likely an effort of my parents to reduce the startling amount of decapitated Barbies piling up in the toy box. My sister and I would often fight over the day's desired doll, one of us pulling on long shiny legs and the other pulling on long shiny hair until, with a rubbery *pop*, the head would come off. I also recollect feeling slightly disappointed when movies such as *The Parent Trap* (1998) came out and I was told that Lindsay Lohan was not, in fact, a twin. As an adult, I can appreciate the technology to create multiple bodies in one frame and the conceptual implications of doubled bodies. As a child, however, I wanted to see other child pairs like my sister and I.

[54] "Mary-Kate and Ashley Olson" filmography, *Listal.com,* November 17, 2010, http://www.listal.com/list/olsen-twins.



Figures 11 and 12: Mary-Kate and Ashely Olsen in *Double Double Toil and Trouble* 1993 (fanpop.com) & Lindsay Lohan in *The Parent Trap,* 1998 (screenappeals.wordpress)

Twin child pairs, such as Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, were a unit: they were the heroines who relied on each other instead of on external forces. Rather than representing dualistic forces of good and evil, the twin girls emulated a bond and strength that appealed to me. When my sister and I played, we mimicked the companionship of heroic pairs familiar to us through popular culture. We were always a team against the antagonist we created—we often played our characters as sisters. Despite the popularity of 'evil twin' stories in popular culture, I have no recollection of playing the evil character to my sister's protagonist, or vice versa. The tendency to divide twins into conceptually opposing categories, however, is not restricted to fiction.

My sister and I, as children, were aware of other people's reactions to us as twins, and, of course, we were misidentified often. Occasionally, albeit rarely, we wore similar or matching outfits (see figure 13), prompting confusion as well as delight. At various times in our life we have been considered and treated as one identity, and yet encouraged to display differences to

emphasize that we were not the same. If I received a 92 percent grade on a math exam, and my sister received an 89 percent grade, I would be described as "good at math" much more often than my sister. We were placed into categories of 'scientific' and 'artistic,' 'detailed' and 'creative,' despite having similar interests and similar academic ranking. We supported these distinctions, perhaps in an attempt to define our respective identities. It was thought, from late elementary until high school, that I would be a doctor and my sister an artist. Others seemed to want us to differentiate *physically* as well as in our strengths and interests. My sister cut her hair very short one year, and hair length became a distinguishing characteristic, one greeted with enthusiasm by those who wanted an easier way of knowing who was who. I cut my long hair off a year or two after her, and received some jostling and joking in return: "why did you go and do that? It used to be so easy to tell you apart." Soon afterwards I got a facial piercing, and some of those same people expressed their satisfaction. Any changes to our appearance have been viewed in relation to the other.

Figure 13: Maia or Cassie, Joshua, and Maia or Cassie at Christmas 1992/93

Visually identical objects or persons lead people to look for distinguishing characteristics. When people need to distinguish one thing from another, they use strategies to differentiate; use dangly knick-knacks to differentiate this wine glass from that wine glass. My lip piercing and skill in the sciences was focused on to distinguish myself from my sister. With twins (or other multiples), differences are often exaggerated.

Subtle physical differences (a freckle here, the presence of a barrette) can only do so much to distinguish one twin from another: the characteristics of each twin must be analyzed, dissected, critiqued and recognized. It certainly seems common for those who know twins or perhaps who have twin infants to describe them in opposing terms: "He's the patient one, but his brother is more feisty"; "She's really involved in sports, and her sister is more of a bookish type." The one child may not be patient at all, only appear to be in opposition to his brother. The "bookish" girl may never describe herself as such—she just doesn't happen to play sports as her sister does. She is described in opposition to, and in relation to, another. I myself am guilty; when strangers ask me about my sister, I portray our differences first and foremost. Identical twins are, it seems, often valued according to the myth of twins being "two sides to the same coin."[55] Taken to extremes, identical doubles in popular culture—twins, doppelgängers, even clones—are commonly portrayed with one of the pair as a deviant or evil conspirator.

A rather startling quote from the director of the Twin Services Support Centre in Berkeley, California, states that some parents "call [Twin Services Consulting] when their [twins] are as young as four days old [...] and say that they already know which one is the 'bad' one."[56] This is an alarming statement, one which leads us to terrible imaginings of a 'Cinderella'

[55] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy,* 49.

[56] Ibid., 61.

sibling forced to endure verbal, mental and even physical abuse at the hands of parents who project negative characteristics onto one child of the pair. Despite a valiant attempt from parents of twins to be equal in their treatment, each twin will nonetheless be raised somewhat differently.[57] The idea that my sister would be *more* creative, myself *more* scientifically inclined, was a projection which appeared to emphasize difference: one which parents and teachers reinforced with good intentions to treat us the same and yet encourage uniqueness. I find it a grotesque irony that the parents of twins may receive identical outfits as gifts from friends and co-workers, and so find themselves misidentifying their own children, while the same well-meaning friends desired to know how the infants *differed*. I find the idea of matching outfits for identical twins baffling. How much more confusing for parents, who are denied the simple strategy of remembering that Baby A is wearing green, Baby B wearing blue? My sister and I often wore hand-me-downs from my cousins so we generally were spared such embarrassment as we grew older. My father likes to joke, though perhaps it's true, that when our wrists broke out of our baby identification bracelets, he marked the bottom of our feet with a permanent marker. A black dot on my right foot, a black dot on my sister's left foot. To this day my sister has a small brown freckle on the sole of her left foot, perhaps a fading tattoo from when we were infants. While my sister and I have a striking similarity to each other, those who spend time with us can quickly differentiate between us. However, being a twin myself affords me no inner knowledge or skill at differentiating other twins. I had a friendship with two girls in high school who were identical twins, and I would never say their name until I heard one of them speak (her voice is low and throaty, and her voice is slightly higher and questioning). If I was paying close attention, I would be able to recognize a single individual freckle on the face of one sister. These

[57] Ibid.,

siblings were not spared from being reminded of their incredible similarity. I remember one sister complaining that when they visited their grandmother they had to wear matching dresses—even at age eighteen. When one twin dyed her hair from blonde to a dark chocolate brown, setting herself apart her from her sister, their mother called the salon and yelled at the stylist and demanded they be fired. Their family seemed to delight in their daughters' identical physiognomy. Twins are often seen as a unit (dressed similarly, treated as one identity), or else their differences are encouraged and exaggerated, prompting a difference of values and attributes. When twins are considered as a unit, their relationship is mythologized as special and particular.

5. Mirrors and Vanishing twins

My sister and I were born premature, as many twins are, but were lucky enough to be of a significant weight and health for twins. Despite our healthy appearance, we were whisked out of the operating room, hours passing before my parents were allowed to see us in our incubators. As we grew, people began referring to my sister and I as 'mirror twins.' I was told that this was because while I am right-handed, my sister is left-handed, and so when facing one another, our asymmetry creates a mirror image. According to our parents, we also had mirrored dimples in our smiles when younger (mine on the right, her single dimple on the left) though we grew out of this particular trait.

Figure 14: Maia (left) holds a spoon in her right hand while Cassandra (right) holds a spoon in her left hand. 1992/1994

'Mirror twins' further enhance the idea of opposing personalities. In the previous examples of artwork by Diane Arbus and Frida Kahlo, symmetry and asymmetry play a compositional role in establishing a relationship between the figures. Strategies of composition, such as symmetry, complicate images of twins or doubles. Though commonly used, such strategies place twins or doubles as pillars, and their similarity or identical natures are reinforced. In the artwork *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967* (see figure 6) the twins are nearly perfect columns in the symmetry of the photograph. The doubled women in *The Two Fridas* (see figure 9) angle towards each other, their hands in their lap each holding a different item—their positions (and handedness, it appears) is mirrored.

Those with left-hand dominance have characteristically been associated with abnormality and evil, and so a mirror twin displaying left hand dominance may be cast similarly. The most common example for how handedness is moralized is in the Latin word 'sinister' which is the word for 'left'[58] as well as being a word that connotes the threatening, wicked, and criminal individual. To be *dextrous,* which literally means 'right-handed,' implies that one is physically adept,[59] moral, and good. The jokes my sister and I endured about evil twins were occasionally aimed at my sister alone: her and her sinister hand. My research into mirror twins has produced mixed results as to the origin of such uncommon asymmetry. While my research has confirmed

[58] Kevin Denny and Vincent O'Sullivan, "The Economic Consequences of Being Left-Handed: Some Sinister Results," *Institute for the Study of Social Change,* University College Dublin (2004, http://www.ucd.ie/economics/research/papers/2004/WP04.22.pdf, 7.

[59] Ibid.,

that identical twins can illustrate human asymmetry,[60] the exact mechanics that make this possible are elusive to me and, it seems, to anyone but expert authorities on the topic:

> The mechanisms linking basic body asymmetry . . . are very poorly understood. . . It is difficult to address these questions without a detailed understanding, at the molecular, genetic, and biochemical levels, of the formation of biased asymmetry in embryos.[61]

Before discussing mirror twins in particular, it is required we first discuss the difference between 'monozygotic' and 'dizygotic' twins, as only monozygotic twins can display mirrored asymmetry.

Monozygotic (identical) twins, such as my sister and I, occur when a *single* fertilized egg splits and continues to grow as two.[62] Dizygotic (fraternal) twins occur when two different eggs are both fertilized by two different sperms.[63] The twins resulting from this type of conception do not have near-identical sets of genes as monozygotic or identical twins do; they are no more genetically similar than any other pair of siblings.

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[60] Michael Levin, "The Embryonic Origins of Left-Right Symmetry," *Sage Journals: Critical Reviews in Oral Biology and Medicine*, vol. 15 no. 4 (July 2004): 197-206, doi: 10.1177/154411130401500403, 197.

[61] Ibid., 198.

[62] "Dichorionic, Monozygotic, Dizygotic, Monochorionic, Monoamniotic, Mono-Mono Twins," *BabyMed*, http://www.babymed.com/monozygotic-monoamniotic-monochorionic-mono-mono-dizygotic-dichorionic-twins.

[63] Ibid.,

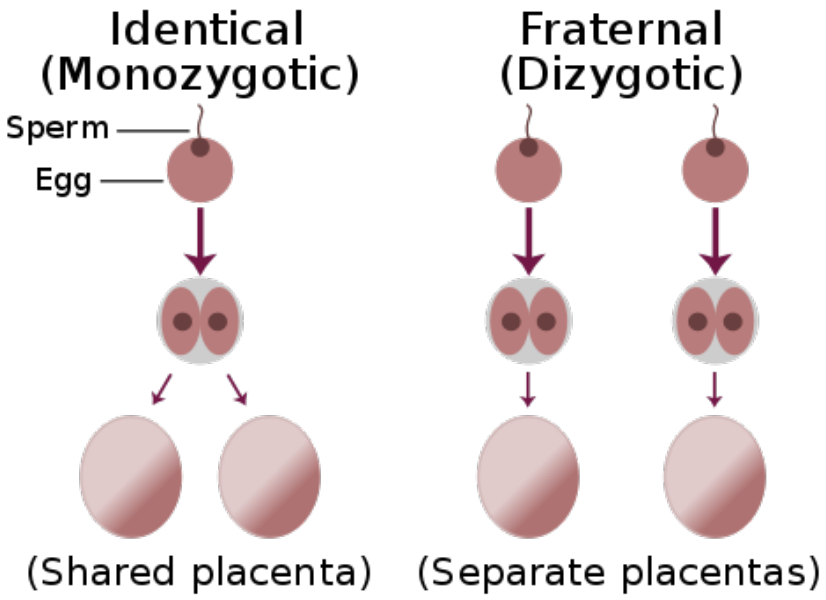

Figure 15: Comparison of zygote development in monozygotic and dizygotic twins (wiki commons).

Mirror twins are understood to be monozygotic twins who are revealed to have asymmetrical features such as mirrored birthmarks, hand dominance, hair whorl direction, tooth patterns, and in extreme cases even mirrored organs or tumour locations.[64] As fertilized egg(s) in utero undergo cellular division, specific membranes form as protective sacs during growth. Dizygotic twins, in being *two* eggs each fertilized by a different sperm, lie within their own membrane sacs and do not share blood vessels.[65] Dizygotic twins have their own chorion and amnion membrane, and their own placenta. These twins are named Diamniotic Dichorionic, specifying that the pair have differing amniotic and chorionic sacs.[66] Identical or monozygotic twins form when the one fertilized egg splits into two; however, depending on when the egg splits results in different types of membrane formation (see figure 16). If the single fertilized egg splits almost immediately

[64] Michael Levin, "Twinning and Embryonic Left-Right Symmetry," in *Twin Lateralisation: Biology and Psychology,* ed. by Michael C. Corballis, Chris McManus, Michael Peters (London: Psychology Press, 1999), 205.

[65] "Dichorionic, Monozygotic," *Babymed.*

[66] Ibid.,

after conception, prior to three or four days, the identical twins would be diamniotic/dichorionic, just as fraternal twins are[67]— though monozygotic twins will share similar genetic composition, while dizygotic twins will not.

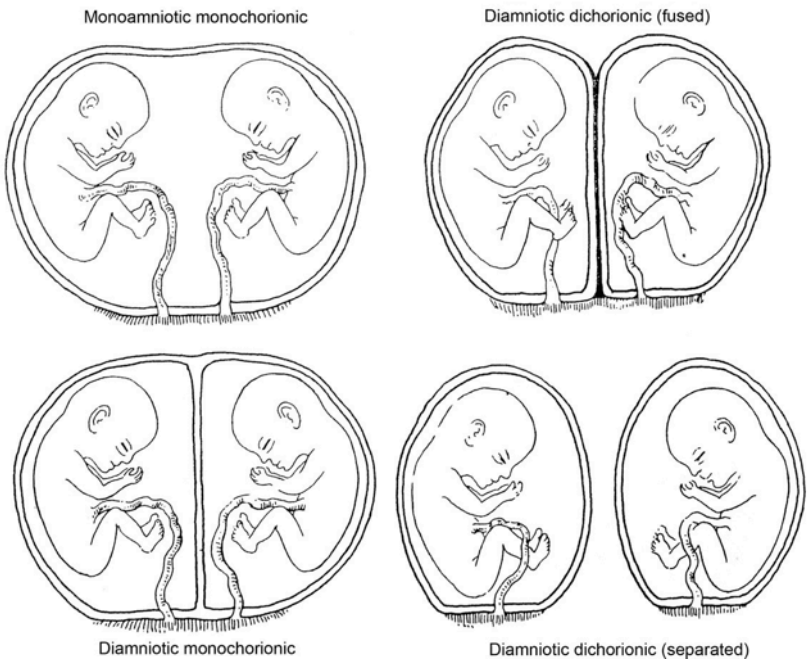

Figure16: Diagram showing the various membrane formations of Monozygotic and Dizygotic twins (babymed.com)

Where mirror twins can occur is when the fertilized egg splits later, after eight days: if the egg splits between eight and thirteen days, the eggs share the same protective sacs—chorion and amnion. They are monochorionic monoamniotic (see figure 16, top left illustration). At this point the twins can encounter specific complications, such as the umbilical cords tangling. As well, after thirteen days the egg may not fully split, resulting in conjoined twins.[68] Mirror twins can

[67] Ibid.,

[68] Ibid.,

result when the egg splits between eight and thirteen days,[69] when monozygotic twins are in a *monoamniotic monochorionic* formation.

Unfortunately most of the rigorous academic sources are steeped in discussion of mechanics far beyond my own knowledge, and so I cannot claim absolutely that the mechanics I've conveyed sufficiently describe the conditions for mirror twins. When I do find language which pities the amateur and attempts to describe the mechanics invoked in mirror twins, researchers and academics still appear to argue amongst themselves whether membrane formation holds any relevance in the existence of mirror twins. In an article from the Scientific American, "Mirror Mirror: Examining Nature's Copy and Paste," Dr. Charles Boklage dismisses many of the common conceptions about mirror twins, claiming that there's a lack of scientific proof explaining why mirror imaging happens:

> 'Mirror-imaging between twins is real, and it almost certainly means something important about embryogenesis,' Boklage wrote in his book *How New Humans Are Made*. 'But, any such relationship is entirely accidental and meaningless in this context, the context in which it is most often discussed.' [70]

Boklage, though agreeing that mirrored asymmetry in twins occurs, does not support that handedness and other physiological manifestations are proof of mirror twins, and so mirror twins are not as common as most think.[71] In the same article, Dr. Nancy Segal disagrees with Boklage in regards to lack of scientific proof— although she concedes that many people are misinformed

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[69] Delyth Raffell, "Types of Twins: Identical, Fraternal and Unusual Twinning," *TwinsUK,* http://www.twinsuk.co.uk/twinstips/4/140/twin-pregnancy--multiple-births/types-of-twins--identical-fraternal--unusual-twinning/#.

[70] John de Dios, "Mirror Mirror: Examining Nature's Copy and Paste," *The Scientific American Blog,* last modified June 21, 2012, http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/2012/06/21/mirror-mirror-examining-natures-copy-and-paste/.

[71] Ibid.,

on what *kind* of twins they, or their children are, and calls mirror image twins a "messy group to research."[72] Though handedness is no sure way to know if one is a mirror twin, other factors have led me to believe that this may have occurred with my sister and I.

When fingerprinting myself for an assignment, I became curious of my sister's fingerprints in relation to mine. We printed ourselves with black ink and discovered that while our fingerprints are not exactly the same, the *patterns* of whorls and loops are. Identical twin's fingerprints cannot be exactly the same, as fingerprints are not entirely due to genetics but are affected by the environment over time.[73] The patterning our fingerprints, however, presents a mirror image. For example, my right hand displays, from thumb to pinky finger: ulnar loop; plain arch; plain arch; radial loop; and radial loop (or, UL; PA; PA; RL; RL). My sister's left hand displays: ulnar loop; plain arch; plain arch (possibly a tented arch); and then finishes with two radial loops, the same as mine (UL; PA; PA; RL; RL). Though my own two hands (right and left) do not match each other, my right matches her left and her left matches my right. When she and I both purchased prescriptions for glasses a few years ago, we discovered that while my left eye is farsighted and right is near-sighted, her right eye is farsighted and left eye is near-sighted. Such characteristics point to us being 'mirror twins,' and thus we may have existed as one fertilized egg for as long as eight days. I use the concept of mirror twins as an extension of my understanding within this research. Mirror twins create a compelling story of two halves to a whole, each person representing the duality of human nature while reflecting each other in

[72] Ibid.,

[73] Pamela Prindle Fierro, "Twins and Fingerprints," *About Health,* last modified June 04, 2014, http://multiples.about.com/cs/funfacts/a/twinfingerprint.htm.

likeness. The use of reflection as well as symmetry is present in my painting *The Sister and the Thistle* (see figure 17).

Figure 17: *The Sisters and the Thistle* by Maia Stark, Oil on Canvas, 5x6 feet, 2014

In *The Sisters and the Thistle* the twins 'mirror' each other in their positions, the sister on the right breaking the perfect symmetry with an extended arm. The water is an important presence in the painting and, though not intentional when I first began the piece, insinuates the legend of Narcissus. The conceit of the Narcissus myth is that of a young and beautiful man who is, according to different versions, cursed by the gods or told by a seer to never gaze at his own reflection.[74] Predictably—just as Sleeping Beauty pricks her finger and Snow White eats the red apple—Narcissus sees his reflection in a pool of water and falls in love with his image,

[74] Encyclopedia Brittanica, s.v. "Narcissus," *Encyclopedia Brittanica Online*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/403458/Narcissus.

eventually dying, either wasting away at the pool's edge or killing himself.[75] According to a later version attributed to Pausanias[76] Narcissus becomes inconsolable after the death of his twin sister who resembled him completely. When he views his reflection, though he knows it is only his own image and not his sister's, he indulges his grief in staying by the water until death.[77] Regardless of which myth came first— vain Narcissus, cursed Narcissus, or Narcissus the twin— my interest in the legend is regarding *reflection* acting as a *double*, and how water as well as the double provokes an association with death. The pond the two sisters lie near represents, in my mind, a threshold. Bodies of water have widely been considered mysterious and fertile; inviting and yet deceptive.[78] The water in the Narcissus myth reflects his own doom: he is trapped by the water's reflective properties. For many different peoples, lakes and rivers have been a symbol of the land of the dead, "of life gone missing into the fluid substance and darkness of another world."[79] While water reflects on its surface, it also contains unimaginable depth. The twin girls in *The Sisters and the Thistle* do not, as Narcissus did, gaze into their reflections. Instead, they seem to consider one another. Rather than water's reflection promising a Narcissus-type character's mortality, they gaze at each other: their knowledge of mortality reflected in a face that promises to age and die before them. The symmetry and duality of twins implies opposing forces such as life and death. Twins and concepts of death are interwoven in stories and

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[75] Ibid.,

[76] Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study,* edited and translated by Harry Tucker Jr. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 68.

[77] Ibid.,

[78] "Water," in *The Book of Symbols,* ed. Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2010), 44.

[79] Ibid.,

cultural responses to twin births: such reactions may promise death for the twins themselves in the context of supernatural interference.

6. Of So Terrifying a Fertility

Twins (and other multiple births such as triplets and quadruplets—though more rare) can be a burden on prospective parents in the context of economic stability. To suddenly feed twice as many children as you expect can be a financial drain on a family expecting only one child. My father likes to joke that when the doctor told my parents that they were pregnant with twins, he immediately began to calculate the cost of twice as many diapers, twice as much formula, twice the baby clothes, etc., Of course it was hardly a joke, as the presence of two infants certainly doubled their expected costs. The history of child abandonment, or infant exposure, is prevalent in many cultures and comes out of a need to establish norms and in certain cases, stabilize family economy.[80] In considering the instances of infant exposure and infanticide across cultures, we see "a biologically adaptive behaviour pattern which ensure that parents do not invest resources in infants with less than the optimum chances of survival."[81] We can imagine that this would include infants born with disfigurements, premature infants who appear sickly and weak—both descriptions which may include conjoined twins and twins. The presence of infanticide across cultures is a "normalizing strategy:"[82] when abnormal births occur a method of disposing such births from sight, or abandoning them to institutions is not far behind.

During Nero's reign in ancient Rome (54-68 AD), Seneca the Younger wrote,

> Mad dogs we knock on the head; the fierce and savage ox we slay; sickly sheep we put to the knife to keep them from infecting the flock; unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown

[80] Helen L. Ball and Catherine M. Hill, "Reevaluating twin infanticide" in *Current Anthropology*, vol. 37, no. 5 (1996): 856-863, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2744421, 856.

[81] Ibid.,

[82] Stewart, *Exploring Twins,* 13.

> even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason that separates the harmful from the sound. [83]

Other philosophers and writers, Greek and Roman, abhorred the practice of infant exposure: Isocrates (436-338 BCE), for example, defined the exposure of infants in his catalogue of horrendous crimes in *Panathenaicus.*[84] Musonius Rufuc, a philosopher in Rome at the same time as Seneca the Younger, also condemned infant exposure and particularly infant exposure practised by the wealthy, as he saw no reason to their desire for less children:

> But what seems to me very terrible is that some who do not *even have poverty as an excuse* but are prosperous and even wealthy none the less have the effrontery not to rear later-born offspring in order that those born earlier may inherit greater wealth ... So that their children may have a greater share of their father's goods, they destroy their children's brothers. [85]

Laws were brought forward in Greece and Rome at different points in history, making the infanticide of children who had been accepted into families or were abandoned in the context of economic grounds illegal.[86] Infant exposure populates both Greek and Roman mythology as a prologue to stories of famous figures.[87] Infant outcasts in such stories are characteristically adopted by compassionate passersby and, occasionally, animals. Such myths which serve as

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[83] Mary Haarsch, "Widespread Roman Infanticide Not Supported by Hambelden Studies," *Roman Times Online Magazine*, last modified May 14, 2011, http://ancientimes.blogspot.ca/2011/05/widespread-roman-infanticide-not.html.

[84] Ibid.,

[85] Ibid.,

[86] Ibid.,

[87] Ibid.,

examples include: Danae and Perseus;[88] Paris of Troy;[89] Oedipus;[90] and, of course, famous twin founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus.[91] Infant exposure acting as a prologue to incredible stories is not limited to Greece and Rome alone. For example, many Germanic fairy-tales make use of the theme of abandonment. Consider the tale "Hansel and Gretel:"

> Next to a great forest there lived a poor woodcutter with his wife and his two children. The boy's name was Hansel and the girl's name was Gretel. He had but little to eat, and once, when a great famine came to the land, he could no longer provide even their daily bread.
> One evening as he was lying in bed worrying about his problems, he sighed and said to his wife, 'What is to become of us? How can we feed our children when we have nothing for ourselves?'
> 'Man, do you know what?' answered the woman. 'Early tomorrow morning we will take the two children out into the thickest part of the woods, make a fire for them, and give

[88] "Perseus," *Greek Mythology,* http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Heroes/Perseus/perseus.html. Danae, the daughter of Acrisius, was locked in a tower so she could never give birth to a child (which an oracle foretold to would kill Acrisius). Zeus approached Danae and Perseus was born soon after. Acrisius shut Danae and the babe into a large chest and cast in out to sea. A fisherman found the two in his net, and rescued them.

[89] Encyclopedia Brittanica, s.v. "Paris," *Encyclopedia Brittanica Online*, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/443614/Paris. King Priam of Troy had a dream in which his son's birth was interpreted as an evil portent. Paris was expelled as an infant. He was, according to different versions, nursed by a bear or found by shepherds.

[90] "Oedipus," *Ancient Greece: Greek Myths,* http://www.ancientgreece.com/s/GreekMyths/Oedipus/. Oedipus was foretold that he would murder his father and marry his mother. Laius, the king of Thebes, gave his son to a herdsman and ordered him to kill the infant. Oedipus survived, however, rescued by a peasant. Oedipus eventually fulfills the prophecy (despite his attempts not to).

[91]Encyclopedia Brittanica, s.v. "Romulus and Remus," *Encyclopedia Brittanica Online,* http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/509038/Romulus-and-Remus. Romulus and Remus, sons of Rhea Silvia, were ordered drowned by their usurper uncle Amulius. However, the trough in which they were placed floated down the river, resting at the future site of Rome. A she-wolf suckled and fed the children until a herdsman adopted them.

each of them a little piece of bread, then leave them by themselves and go off to our work. They will not find their way back home, and we will be rid of them.' [92]

The two children are abandoned due to famine and economic strife: the parents cannot feed the children, and so they leave them to fate. Tellingly, the two children, while not described as twins, are abandoned together: their unity in the story, though not specified as such, calls to mind the companionship of twin siblings. The literary evidence of outspokenness against exposure as well as stories which highlight exposure and abandonment indicate that infanticide did exist in the ancient world though it was not as common as many think (in Ancient Rome and Greece specifically). [93] Infanticide is still practiced in contemporary cultures, despite laws placed against the practice. In present day infanticide has become particularly gendered as a result of the ongoing patriarchal denigration of female persons. In cultures where a preference for sons is built into the cultural ideology, abandonment, direct action (murder), indirect action (such as neglect and discrimination leading to death), and sex-selective abortion are the means by which many female-sexed children die.[94] Children born against the normative ideology of society have been vulnerable to infanticidal practices— the 'norm,' as discussed earlier in the context of the female grotesque, being white, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied.

Twins, to return to our specific interests, have been traditionally seen to create problems in a family dynamic. There are a wide variety of cultural responses to twin births, as some cultures believe that twins promise good fortune, while some groups are ambivalent, and others

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[92] Jacob and Wilhem Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel," *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts,* ed. D.L Ashliman, last modified September 7, 2011, http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm015.html.

[93] Haarsch, "Widespread Roman Infanticide."

[94] "Female Infanticide," *Women and Global Human Rights,* http://www2.webster.edu/~woolflm/femaleinfanticide.html.

see twins as premonitory of disaster[95] and will, consequently, dispose of one or both infants. Negative reactions to multiple births, though common in some cultures, are not universal. The many extreme responses to twin births, however, and the association of twins with the supernatural is of interest to me— particularly in the context of the Western popularization of 'evil twin' motifs. In their paper "Reevaluating Twin Infanticide" Helen Ball and Catherine Hill note that in many situations (and from an evolutionary standpoint) it made sense to kill infants, singleton or otherwise: parents unable or unwilling to invest in the child would "cut their losses. . . and then [invest] in the next [child.]"[96] They note, however, that the rationale for killing twins should be examined more closely, as twin births are less common and incite particular reactions.

First, we must consider that twins have been, and generally are, born as "lowered viability infants."[97] Due to the physical toll of multiple fetus pregnancy, many twin pairs (and other multiples such as triplets and quadruplets) are generally born premature and may display birth defects.[98] Though medical advancements have assisted to diminish certain conditions or difficulties in pregnancy with twin or multiple births, to bear twins or multiples was, and still can be, a cause for alarm. Expectant parents will not only be concerned about premature births, which are much more common in multiple pregnancies (60 percent of multiple pregnancies are premature, compared with 10 percent of singleton pregnancies),[99] but also various problems

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[95] Ball and Hill, "Reevaluating twin infanticide," 857.

[96] Ibid., 858.

[97] Ibid.,

[98] "Multiple Pregnancy and Birth: Twins, Triplets, and High Order Multiples," *American Society for Reproductive Medicine,* http://www.asrm.org/BOOKLET_Multiple_Pregnancy_and_Birth/.

[99] Ibid.,

which can lead to blindness, underdeveloped lungs, and placental complications.[100] Preterm delivery may result in one child being born with a long-term handicap, since early deliveries place infants at increased risk for complications in development.[101] Twin-Twin Transfusion Syndrome, for example, is a life threatening condition that can affect identical twins (who typically share a placenta and circulatory system while in the womb). One fetus is subject to poor growth when nutritional blood flows mainly in one direction, from the sickly twin to the healthy twin through their shared placenta.[102] In societies where the birth of twins, let alone the raising and care of both, is difficult or impossible, the parents may choose to dispose of the weaker twin.[103] I can only start to imagine the trauma and sadness felt at the birth of underdeveloped twins, the single child one hoped for instead presenting itself as two or more infants struggling to survive. If one twin appears healthy, the other ill, as is the case in Twin-Twin Transfusion Syndrome, we can picture the fear parents could feel in a culture or age where supernatural forces appear to hold sway— did one child do this to the other? Where did the other child come from? Is the sickly one an evil presence… or is the healthy one an impostor who failed to murder their poor sibling before birth? The reaction to such unanswered questions may result in a sad fate for one or both infants.

Secondly, we consider the concept of inappropriate conception which Hill and Ball outline: "In many societies infanticide is alleged to occur following inappropriate conceptions.

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[100] Ibid.,

[101] Ibid.,

[102] Ibid.,

[103] Ball and Hill, "Reevaluating twin infanticide," 858.

Among the Mehinaku and some Australian Aboriginal groups there is a belief that multiple births are the result of conception from two or more different fathers."[104] In mythology the birth of twins (as well as singular heroes) is often explained with unusual conception in an attempt to explain an unusual life: for example, Greek figures Castor and Pollux were conceived between the god Zeus and a woman named Leda. In this myth, Zeus disguises himself as a swan and impregnates Leda; subsequently the twins are born from eggs.[105] One brother, Castor, is born immortal after his father, while his brother Pollux is born mortal after Leda[106]. With that juxtaposition, the twins have already been coded as opposing forces—a kind of mirror twinning takes place with their experience of mortality. Concern about the ambiguity of paternity is present in myths as well as in responses to twin births in stories. It is felt, in many cultures, that surely no *single* man could produce two or more children at once.[107] Therefore, the mother has committed adultery— either with another man, an evil spirit,[108] or, as we have seen in certain myths, a god. An interesting theme in some western European folktales makes use of an abundance of fertility as the *punishment* for questioning the fidelity of a mother of twins. In these stories the nature of the children is not disputed as good or evil; rather, the morality of the accuser is focused on.

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[104] Ibid., 859.

[105] "Castor," *Encyclopedia Mythica,* last modified August 02, 2004, http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/castor.html.

[106] Ibid.,

[107] Stewart, *Exploring Twins,*18.

[108] Ibid.,

In the folktale "As Many Children As There Are Days in the Year," a Countess of a region in the Netherlands ridicules a begging woman who carries twins.[109] The beggar asks for charity and the Countess scolds her, saying, "Get away, you shameless beggar! It is impossible for a woman to have two children at once from just one father!"[110] The beggar is assumed to be adulterous and is therefore unworthy of charity. The begging woman replies: "Then may God let you have as many children as there are days in the year!"[111] Eventually the Countess becomes pregnant and gives birth to not one, but three hundred and sixty-five children.[112] All three hundred and sixty-five children and their mother die after birth and are then buried in one grave, a sad ending for both the Countess and her many children. Another version of the story describes the Countess as childless and selfish, specifying that she is jealous of other women with children. She similarly attempts to drive off the begging mother of twins, shouting,

> 'I don't believe that any one, man or woman, could have two children at once. Away with you,' and she seized a stick to drive off the poor woman . . . 'Heaven punish you, you wicked, cruel, cold-hearted woman' cried the mother . . . 'May you have as many children as there are days in the year!' . . .
> There were as many as, and no fewer children than, there were days in the year; and, since this was leap year, there were three hundred and sixty-six little folks in the house.[113]

When the children are born, none of them are bigger than a mouse. A colourful description follows as housemaids struggled to separate and remember the children —"but soon it seemed

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[109] Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "As Many Children as There Are Days in the Year," *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts,* ed. D.L Ashliman, last modified September 20, 2011, http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/manykids.html#days.

[110] Ibid.,

[111] Ibid.,

[112] Ibid.,

[113] Ibid.,

hopeless to try to pick out Peter from Henry, or Catalina from Annetje."[114] A comical scene proceeds: trying to name the children and find clothing for the small bodies, the story arcing with the spectacle of an excited parade of helpers carrying silver trays of mouse-sized babies to church to be baptized. Despite this merriment, all the children die before the sun sets.[115] The Countess is granted her wish of a child, but punished for her greed and selfish nature with an overabundance of fertility and still no children. These stories, in contrast to most others, represent an ideology that does not assume the *origin* of twin births to be supernatural. However, the idea that the mother of twins must have committed adultery is present, though portrayed as a falsehood. Explanations of twin birth are typically organized in relation to the mother: they result from what she did or didn't do.

The social confusion in regards to paternity and the supernatural origin of twins has customarily resulted in dire consequences for children and mother alike. The Yoruba group of Western Nigeria have, at different points, considered identical children worthy of either adoration or abhorrence.[116] Previous to the mid-eighteenth century, the Yoruba of Western Nigeria did not welcome twin births: they practiced an infanticide customary among many other groups who saw twins as antagonistic to local economies as well as disturbing to a natural order "in which only animals should give birth to multiples."[117] This association with animals implies an abnormal and dangerous value to the progenitors of twin births: this danger is often linked

[114] Ibid.,

[115] Ibid.,

[116] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy*, 22–23.

[117] Ibid., 22.

with "supernatural or superhuman powers and qualities."[118] Questions about paternity also influenced the way twin births were received among the Western Yoruba— mothers could be blamed for promiscuous behaviour which led to the disturbing and unnatural birth.[119] A prescribed methodology of dealing with twin births is not surprising, as the twinning rate of the Yoruba is among the highest in the world, a new set of twins born every 16-22 births.[120] Before trade with the South-West Yoruba group (who had a competing tradition in which twins were respected and revered) one twin or both were smothered, the parents cleansed, and occasionally the woman who had given birth to the children was exiled to a "twin town" to live among "others possessed of so terrifying a fertility."[121] The cult of twins that emerged among the Yoruba *after* abandoning infanticidal practice regarded twins as sacred. It was thought that both siblings represent manifestations of one's guardian spirit who lives in the sky: "The [twins] shared a soul. As each person has a guardian spirit in the sky, in cases of twin birth the spirit must have gotten tangled up with its earthly counterpart. Since none could tell earth-walker from skydouble, both were sacred: *Ejire*, "two who are one."[122] The social confusion over paternity in the infanticide practicing group instead became a cause for celebration; the twin infants have a strange or supernatural origin, but rather than an evil spirit or other man, the twins are the earthly manifestations of spirits. Similar to Castor and Pollux, one child is directly connected to the divine.

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[118] Stewart, *Exploring Twins,*19.

[119] White, "The Trouble with Twins," 11.

[120] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy*, 22.

[121] Ibid.,

[122] Ibid., 23.

Fear of the supernatural, the inability to feed your family, and knowledge of twins complicating pregnancy, has historically and culturally lent a disconcerting tone to twin and multiple births. Despite such births no longer being received as a "grim surprise,"[123] twins still prompt compelling questions about one's identity: "from initial images on monitors, twins carry with them the age old drama of a compound self."[124] Although medical improvements and technologies have reduced the danger to mother and to twins themselves, the idea of lost siblings or lost halves haunts the public mind. One sees this in such phenomena as 'Vanishing Twin Syndrome' and the pervasive idea that we are born as an incomplete self.

Vanishing Twin Syndrome is a phenomenon in which one fetus or embryo dies, i.e., disappearing or vanishing, and the remaining child is born single.[125] Alessandra Piontelli notes that as many as one in eight natural pregnancies begin as twins, but a mere 2 percent will result in delivery of both children.[126] The death of one child may take place at any stage during twin pregnancies and without medical equipment such as sonograms mothers could be completely unaware that, for a short amount of time, they carried twins.[127] Though many suspected that occasionally twin fetuses did not always survive the womb, the presence of twins 'vanishing' in the first trimester was revealed by Salvator Levi of Brussels in 1975[128] with the aid of fetoscopy and ultrasound: Levi "lifted the vanished twin out of fiction and philosophy and into obstetric

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[123] Ibid., 19.

[124] Ibid.,

[125] Piontelli, *Twins*, 17.

[126] Ibid.,

[127] Ibid.,

[128] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy*, 20.

fact."[129] The idea that many people have missed the existence of a sibling never born haunts us, according to Schwartz: "vanished twinship assures us of a sempiternal human link, [and] it affords us also the pathos of inexpressible loss."[130] Piontelli does not treat the vanished twin with such romantic musings:

> Much has been made about the so called 'vanishing twin' phenomenon, the not infrequent finding of another gestational sac during an early first-trimester scan. It is hard to imagine that an early fetus could 'miss' something that is has never felt. Intrapair stimulation usually only starts when such a 'vanishing twin' would have already ceased to exist.[131]

Though I am convinced by Piontelli's stipulation that a fetus could not miss the companionship of another fetus while in the womb, there is something to be considered in Schwartz's description of loss for another 'self.' Schwartz notes that during Plato's symposium on love Aristophanes spoke of a primordial double human being, who was split by Zeus and had to search always for it's other half.[132] The desire for companionship— not only of sexual companionship but a deeper, possibly ideal relationship based in understanding and friendship— is fairly universal among children and adults alike.[133] I do not think such desires come from the wish to have a *double*, per se, but rather in the longing to experience such mythic closeness that, some believe, can only be granted to those who share a womb. My sister and I have encountered others expressing jealousy at our relationship: "I wish I had a twin," "I wish my brother and I

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[129] Ibid.,

[130] Ibid., 21, emphasis mine.

[131] Piontelli, *Twins,* 51.

[132] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy*, 20.

[133] Piontelli, *Twins,* 51.

were as close as you two." I agree that my sister and I's relationship is close—not as close as some other twins or even siblings, perhaps, but close nonetheless. Our relationship is not affected by biology or supernatural connections, than it is, I think, a reflection of shared experience. We attended the same school, struggled with the same changes in our life at the same age, and we had the same friends for most of our youth. The yearning for close sisterhood or brotherhood seems particularly incited by twin siblings. The desire for such companionship is curiously not made manifest in the appearance of one's double, as in many stories this appearance is portrayed as a distinctly undesirable experience— as I will discuss in regards to 'doppelgängers' later on. There appears to be an idea that a twin can tell individuals something about their own particular human beingness. To have a twin could, perhaps, be the ultimate in circumstance for self-reflection. If you were to meet yourself exactly you could interact with yourself, discussing with understanding and yet with a unique perspective on your own arguments or thoughts. Having a twin has not, I think, given me any great insight into who I am as an individual, however. Despite these romantic ideas, my twin and I are separate individuals: we do not reflect each other. Yet the desire for knowledge of oneself popularizes twins as special relationships, emphasizing closeness and friendship, seeming to incite the desire in many for such particular companionship. The myth of twins being two halves to a whole—that human beings in their search for companionship have, as Aristophanes thought, needed to search for their own other half—leads us to the idea that we are missing something: physically, emotionally, or spiritually. In description of Frida Kahlo's work, Grimberg describes Kahlo's self portraits as speaking to her "loneliness, her feelings of incompleteness, [and] fragmentation."[134] *The Two Fridas,* with their clasped hands and composed posture, represent two parts of Kahlo's identity. Similarly,

[134] Grimberg, *Frida Kahlo*, 97.

perhaps having a true double would provide an understanding of our selves and bring us closer to a sense of wholeness. Though many may wish for a companion I think that, despite loneliness and feelings of incompleteness, one would still shudder at the idea of another person with our exact face, vocal cadence, physicality, and mannerisms. The double, after all, is an *uncanny* image, associated with death and hidden knowledge.

7. The Uncanny

The double is the personification of both the immortality of the soul and a harbinger of one's death. Freud discusses the double as the peak of 'the uncanny,' a concept which is detailed in his 1919 essay, "The Uncanny." Freud first attempts to define the uncanny as a subject of aesthetics: he discusses that in the subject of aesthetics, the uncanny is a province which has been neglected for a preference on beauty, the sublime, and other attractive emotions.[135] The uncanny, then, is situated within a notion of aesthetics associated with the grotesque, dissent, and discomfort. Freud develops this idea by situating the uncanny within the semantic field of the word's German derivatives: *heimlich* and *unheimlich.*

While *heimlich* refers to, across varying definitions, that which is familiar, "home-like,"[136] of the body and intimate, it also has a striking ambivalence in its use; *heimlich* can also mean that which is hidden, secretive, deceptive, and malicious.[137] *Heimlich* becomes *unheimlich,* that which is un-familiar, secretive, gruesome, and which has the ability to induce horror.[138] These words are not meant as opposites in meaning,[139] despite the presence of the prefix 'un,'which often expresses an absence or reversal. These two words, instead, are more like strange twins themselves, blurring meaning between them. Perhaps *unheimlich* is the doppelgänger of *heimlich,* which has two different meanings (home-like and familiar and yet

[135] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," (1919) Kindle E-book, n.p.

[136] Ibid.,

[137] Ibid.,

[138] Ibid.,

[139] Ibid.,

secretive and deceptive). *Unheimlich* is the mirror reflection of that second definition, twisting such negative undertones into an even darker meaning.

Freud's premise in his essay is that the uncanny is a thing experienced in adulthood which reminds us of earlier, unconscious aspects of our life: something hidden which has risen to the surface.[140] The uncanny is the recurrence of something long forgotten and repressed, the *un/heimlich* of lived experience. Much of Freud's discussion on the uncanny is based in the mechanics of literature, returning to certain fictions to illustrate points about the necessary conditions and certain infantile fears that create an uncanny feeling. Among this—in line with Freud's theoretical principles— is a fear of the loss of one's eyes or other body parts, which Freud equates with a primordial fear of sexuality and castration.[141] Freud facilitates a road map of understanding for me, one in which I can situate my knowledge and interest in doubles. While I am not particularly compelled by all of his lines of reasoning, the connections of the uncanny to childhood fears is engaging.

When I consider my own fears as a child among them are death; the dark; being alone; and fear of various stories which ended in gruesome activity. Folktales and fairytales acknowledge the reality of such fears. The main character, in many infamous stories, is often lost in the woods alone. They encounter a threat, supernatural or monstrous, which results in death for either the protagonist or antagonist: many fairytales end with the threat vanquished, but many less well-known tales which have not been carried on through popular culture portray a terrible end for the main character who has made a mistake or sinned. Such is the case in the tale "The Red Shoes" from Hans Christen Anderson. In "The Red Shoes," a young girl is punished for her

[140] Eco, *On Ugliness,* 311.

[141] Ibid., 312.

vanity, represented in her preference for wearing red shoes to church[142]. She is cursed by a stranger and forced to dance in the shoes day and night, never being able to take them off. The most *uncanny* part of the tale, which is otherwise filled with moral petitions for Christian humbleness and god's forgiveness, is when the main character begs an executioner (who lives in the forest) to chop off her feet at the ankles:

> . . . the shoes had grown fast to her feet. And dance she did, for dance she must, over fields and valleys, in the rain and in the sun, by day and night. It was most dreadful by night . . .
> She confessed her sin, and the executioner struck off her feet with the red shoes on them. The shoes danced away with her little feet, over the fields into the deep forest.[143]

The disquieting notion of severed body parts moving after death is certainly uncanny: it is against nature and rational thought, an imaginable thing but an inexplicable one. The fright of the tale is enhanced by setting and violence—amputation in the dark forest at night. A feeling of the uncanny is tied to the inexplicable: when we lose our way when we should know it perfectly well; when nightmares and omens become reality; when an object seems to move or have motive of its own volition; and when we see ourselves perform outside of our own control.

Freud includes in the genre of the 'uncanny double' the way one can identify with another:

> [w]hat we should call telepathy—so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies [themselves] with another person, so that [their] self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for [their] own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. [144]

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[142] Hans Christian Anderson, "The Red Shoes," translated by Jean Hersholt, *The Hans Christian Anderson Centre,* last modified October 8, 2013, http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheRedShoes_e.html.

[143] Ibid.,

[144] Freud, "The Uncanny," n.p.

Here, we can imagine biological twins identifying with their sibling to such an extent, as to seem 'telepathic.' Many times my sister and I have received comments exclaiming over our easy conversation as we jump seamlessly from topic to person to conflict and agreement. Occasionally we are subject to jokes about telepathy and mind reading, though I think any claims to such supernatural activities are simply grounded in familiarity and like-mindedness. In a story where doubles have a malevolent nature, such as in "William Wilson" by Edgar Allan Poe, a similar "interchanging [of] the self" may occur when the main character feels confusion between identities: "It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking."[145] According to Freud, even a recurrence of similar situations, identical faces, character-traits, crimes and names can be part of the uncanny double.[146] I am reminded, here, of Dosteovsky's novella titled, fittingly, *The Double,* a story in which a nervous and introverted man meets his other 'self,' who is a version of him which is contrastingly outspoken and popular. The two are opposites in character despite their identical countenance. In the story, before even meeting the main character's double, we are subjected to an incredibly repetitive use of names. Not having studied Russian literature or culture, I do not know if this repetition is common courtesy in speech between a councillor and his doctor, or if, as I suspect, Dosteovsky is subjecting his audience to a semantic flood of repetition. The main character, in talking with his doctor Krestyan Ivanovich, implores him:

> Yes, sir, Krestyan Ivanovich. Although I am indeed a quiet man, Krestyan Ivanovich, as I think I've already had the honour to explain to you, still my way takes a separate course,

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[145] Fyodor Dosteovsky, *The Double,* translated by Alastair McEwen (NY: Rizzoli International Publications, 2007), 12–13.

[146] Ibid.,

> Krestyan Ivanovich. The path of life is wide…I mean… by that I mean to say, Krestyan Ivanovich… Excuse me, Krestyan Ivanovich, I have no way with fine words. [147]

The main character speaks this way throughout their entire conversation, interrupting himself with the name of his doctor several times in a single paragraph of speech for several pages. The recurrence of names briefly mentioned by Freud appears to be important in this case, such repetition perhaps acting as a fervid need to affirm a name, an identity, or perhaps to draw importance to the use of repetition itself. Where Freud's discussion of the uncanny holds my interest most, however, is where he connects the double to death and (im)mortality.

Freud bases his discussion on the double and its ethereal relation to death in referring to Otto Rank's psychoanalytic study, "Der Doppelgänger," or "The Double." Both Rank and Freud discuss the legend of Narcissus as an example of the double—represented by Narcissus's reflection—providing the impetus to death: Narcissus's reflection itself or the memory of his twin sister assures his doom. The double is associated with the belief in a soul and a fear of death, "[f]or the 'double' was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' . . . and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body."[148] Here, we are reminded of the Yoruba twin cult, where the twins are considered each partly or wholly spiritual, guardian spirits made earthly. Freud states that such ideas, the double as a reassurance against death *and* an assurance of one's immortality as a soul, come out of self-love which is part of the realm of the child.[149] At this point, the double is a neutral figure and is non-threatening. Once we have left childhood and begin to recognize our

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[147] Ibid.,

[148] Freud, "The Uncanny," n.p.

[149] Ibid.,

own mortality, however, Freud states that the double takes on a darker feel: "from having been an assurance of immortality, [it] becomes the ghastly harbinger of death."[150] The double as ghastly harbinger of death is well explored with stories revolving around the German doppelgänger, in particular the type of doppelgänger popularized by 19th century literature such as Dosteovsky's *The Double*, where stories characteristically end in death.

[150] Ibid.,

8. Doppelgängers

When we enter the terrain of the supernatural twin— such as the doppelgänger— the double becomes emblematic of a second representation of the self—a self which characteristically acts with malice. The classic tale "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" evokes this motif well, the subconscious personified as Mr. Hyde, a diabolical character who acts with violence and cruelty— directly opposing the generous and sociable Dr. Jekyll. Other examples of literary works focused on doppelgängers, such as Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846) and Guy de Maupassant's short stories "Le Horla" (1887) and "Lui?"(1880-1893) imagine the doppelgänger as a sinister twin or spectre, "the worse but seductive half of a self struggling to mature."[151] Present throughout popular culture's portrayal of the doppelgänger is the duality of a single individual's conscious goodwill and subconscious desires.

Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote *The Double* in the midst of a fifty-year period in which many European authors picked up the motif, and essentially transformed the original Scandinavian and Slavic "double-goer."[152] Originally a divine shape-shifter of protection or a ghostly look-a-like, the Scandinavian and Slavic doppelgänger evolved into the currently known *malicious* doppelgänger: a supernatural impostor and harbinger of disaster.[153] Other examples where doubles are utilized as conflicting forces, usually of good and evil, exist in visual media—art and film— as well as literature; for the doppelgänger is, above all, a figure of *visual compulsion.*[154]

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[151] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy,* 65.

[152] Ibid.*,* 64.

[153] Ibid.,

[154] Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.

Many stories about doubles, such as doppelgängers, involve murder and violence. Such violence results in the struggle over a claim to a singular identity. The main character (the 'true' self) cannot exist as an individual when their double exists, and many stories which feature a struggle for identity ends in the destruction not only of the double, but of the self as well.

Figure 18: *Doppelgänger 02.15.08* by Cornelia Hediger, digital photograph 2008 (corneliahediger.com)

The appearance of one's double seems doomed to resolve itself in a death—either the double's death or the death of the 'true' self. Doppelgängers are, as Hillel Schwartz describes: "double-goers, mirror-twisted twins without whom the other has neither past nor future, yet in whose present and *presence tragedy must ensue*."[155] Artist Cornelia Hediger explores this concept in her photo series "Doppelgänger" and "Doppelgänger II." Hediger grew up familiar

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[155] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy*, 64, emphasis mine.

with the concept of doppelgängers at a young age, describing their presence as unsettling and a "little bit scary."[156] Using her own body, Hediger photographs all sections of an image separately, so that the figure(s) and setting are disturbed through changes in perspective and subtle distortions of figure and objects. The distortions occurring, bodies lengthening or shortening, hands or feet growing and shrinking, brings to mind the grotesque female body. The persons in her images, usually herself, often seem aware of each other; the scene carries a quiet yet dramatic tone as one double comes across another. In both photo series Hediger draws on themes of the threatening double from German literature by introducing an element of danger or insecurity. In *Doppelgänger 01.15.08*, for example, the figure looking back at the camera holds a sharp pair of sewing scissors in hand; holding the scissors *not* with a grip reminiscent of cutting, but rather with a grip evocative of piercing or stabbing. The second figure (seeming to contemplate her would-be-attacker) seems calm, except for the tumbling down of a second teacup—perhaps foreshadowing some future action. The 'real' self is not clearly implied in Hediger's work. The audience cannot easily— if at all— deduce which body is the impostor or if the two could have equal claim to a single identity. Incorporating the theme of doppelgängers into her work is a way for Hediger to confront alter egos, her own subconscious, and an internal struggle over identity.[157] When describing the implied violence in her works, Hediger states that "the outcome of a Doppelgänger interaction often is that one ends up in suicide, where the Self is

[156] "Cornelia Hediger, Doppelgängers," Interview by *Blink Contemporary Photography Magazine*, issue 6 (September 2011), http://corneliahediger.com/pdfs/BLINK_issue6.pdf, 5.

[157] Ibid., 6.

trying to kill her/his double"[158] — this is a pattern of narrative which is characteristic of many stories involving doppelgängers.

Film, as well as literature and visual art, makes use of the doppelgänger motif. In the movie *Dead Ringer* (1964) Edith Philips murders her wealthy twin sister, Margaret DeLorca, and seamlessly assumes her identity.[159] The audience grapples with the cliché of good versus evil in this film, when the likeable 'good twin' Edith becomes a murderer by disposing of her detestable and selfish twin sister. In the film *The Brøken* (2008) the main character is surrounded by doubles of a different kind. Gina survives a car accident only to awaken convinced that her partner is no longer the same person—she believes that he has been replaced. Gina is subsequently diagnosed with Capgras Syndrome: a disorder where one believes that a close relative or friend has been substituted with an exact double.[160] Gina eventually discovers, however that her friends and family are being replaced: their reflections are escaping the mirror and murdering the originals.[161] In the film *Black Swan* (2010), the main character is haunted by glimpses of a woman who looks like her in mirrors and in hallways.[162] The film incorporates themes of the unconscious self, repressed sexuality, and monstrous transformations. Such themes remind us of concepts of the double as well as the female grotesque. The double is the repressed

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[158] Ibid., 7.

[159] *Dead Ringer*, directed by Paul Henreid (1964; United States: Warner Bros Pictures, 2004), DVD.

[160] Jenni Ogden, "The Capgras Delusion: You Are Not My Wife," Psychology Today, http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/trouble-in-mind/201208/the-capgras-delusion-you-are-not-my-wife.

[161] *The Brøken,* directed by Sean Ellis (2008; France: Gaumont films, 2009), DVD.

[162] *Black Swan*, Aronofsky (2010: USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures), Netflix.

side of the self, and the female grotesque lies within references of death, age, and animal transformation in the film. The climax of the story ends with murder, a mirror, and suicide.[163]

In Deostyevsky's *The Double* (1866) the main character, Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin, meets his double while out walking—though he doesn't realize it immediately. [164]

> The thing was that this stranger now seemed somehow familiar to him. That would still have been all right . . . He has often seen him, this man, seen him at some time, very recently even; where could it have been? [165]

Mr. Golydkin engages in a goose-chase with the stranger as he makes his way home—following in curiosity, abandoning the chase, seeing the stranger on another corner and so following again, until Mr. Golydkin decides to return home. At this point, he spots the stranger running into his own building and follows him up the stairs. He sees his manservant welcome the stranger into his home:

> Beside himself, the hero of our tale ran into his abode . . . Everything that he had feared and that he had foreseen had now happened in reality. His breathing broke off, his head began to spin. The stranger, also wearing his greatcoat and hat, sat before him on *his* bed, smiling slightly and, squinting a little, he nodded to him amicably . . . [h]is nocturnal friend was none other than he himself— Mr. Golyadkin himself, another Mr. Golyadkin, but absolutely the same as he himself…[166]

The story concludes with the original Golyadkin eventually confined to an asylum. The story is filled with pity for the poor main character, who is simply *not as good* as his doppelgänger: the other Mr. Golyadkin is more sociable, friendly, and well liked. The impostor does not assume the

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[163] Ibid.,

[164] Dosteovsky, *The Double,* 49-54.

[165] Ibid., 50

[166] Ibid., 53.

identity through force, but by careful manipulation and by appealing to the colleagues of the original (and heartily disliked) Golyadkin.

In Edgar Allen Poe's short story, "Willam Wilson," the main character is haunted by a boy who not only looks like him, but also has the same name (William Wilson), and even the same birthday. Though William leaves his school (trying to leave behind the other boy), the other William continues to haunt our main character, following him in his adult life and committing acts of debauchery—acts which are incorrectly attributed to the main character. The climax of the story occurs at a masked ball where, after stopping the other William from seducing a married woman, our William pulls his double into a room and stabs him repeatedly:

> The contest was brief indeed . . . In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom. . . .A large mirror . . . now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced, with a feeble and tottering gait, to meet me . . . It was my antagonist -- it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution . . .
> It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper; and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said --
> *'You have conquered, and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead -- dead to the world and its hopes. In me didst thou exist -- and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.'* [167]

In attacking his double, William Wilson in fact murdered himself: the other William had existed as a part of him, and neither could live without the other—they are, in a way, akin to 'psychic' conjoined twins. Notably, mirrors play a role in this story, as the mirror represents what William could not see before: his reflection as the *evil* Wilson. The mirror is noteworthy in both "William Wilson," *Black Swan* and *The Brøken*: mirrors, it appears, in all three cases act as a truth telling

[167] Edgar Allen Poe, "William Wilson," *Poe Stories,* http://poestories.com/read/williamwilson.

object. By seeing oneself in the mirror, the projection of the doppelgänger is either made real or revealed as a fiction of the mind.

In the aforementioned de Maussapant short story the main character is driven to violent or drastic measures. In “Lui?” (also titled “The Terror”) the main character writes to his friend to tell him of his upcoming marriage. The marriage is not a match made in love or affection, but instead is a means to an end: “ . . .the fact, however, is that I am afraid of being alone.”[168] He recounts how he returned home one night, after failing to find company and companionship outside in order to waylay his feelings of loneliness:

> . . . in the act of taking up a candle, I noticed somebody sitting in my armchair by the fire, warming his feet, with his back toward me. I was not in the slightest degree frightened. I thought, very naturally, that some friend or other had come to see me . . . I could see nothing of my friend but his head, and he had evidently gone to sleep while waiting for me, so I went up to him to rouse him. I saw him quite distinctly; his right arm was hanging down and his legs were crossed; the position of his head, which was somewhat inclined to the left of the armchair, seemed to indicate that he was asleep.
> "Who can it be?" I asked myself. I could not see clearly, as the room was rather dark, so I put out my hand to touch him on the shoulder, and it came in contact with the back of the chair. There was nobody there; the seat was empty.
> I fairly jumped with fright. For a moment I drew back as if confronted by some terrible danger; then I turned round again, impelled by an imperious standing upright, panting with fear, so upset that I could not collect my thoughts, and ready to faint.[169]

The spectre is not described beyond the attributed male gender of the figure and a prone posture. This, rather than a detailed reflection of the physical characteristics of our main character (also undescribed) contributes to a sense of unease in the story. The positioning of the figure particularly disturbs the main character. Later he worries, “[h]is right arm hanging down and his

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[168] Guy de Maupassant, “The Terror,” *Maupassant Original Stories,* Project Gutenberg E-Book (October 02, 2014) n.p., http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3090/3090-h/3090-h.htm#2H_4_0100.

[169] Ibid., n,p

head inclined to the left like a man who was asleep—I don't want to think about it! Why, however, am I so persistently possessed with this idea? His feet were close to the fire!"[170] The spectre, with feet so close to the fire, was "*like* a man asleep"… and we, the audience, and perhaps though not explicitly, the narrator, worries that the figure was indeed dead. Here the spectre doppelgänger fulfills its role as a harbinger of death, the apparition perhaps foretelling a night when our main character sits prone in the armchair by the fire, right arm hanging down and head inclined to the left. This spectre may be foreshadowing our main character's eventual death as his anxiety and fear consumes him. This story does not end in murder or suicide. The main character's drastic actions in response are made through the quick engagement to a person he does not care for. The short story's relationship to the doppelgänger is further enhanced when we consider de Maupassant's personal mental struggles: de Maupassant, having spent the end of his life in an asylum, is known to have confessed that "[e]very other time when I return home, I see my double. I open the door and see myself sitting in the armchair."[171] In many stories, the malevolent double, our doppelgänger, foretells tragedy. The haunting presence of something we cannot understand moves us to drastic action; or, the doppelgänger interferes with our lives directly in order to lay a claim to our identity. Though the double is clearly surrounded by tales of violence and struggle, of competition between identities, my thesis work does not reflect such themes. The presence of the twin girls does, I think, satisfy a feeling of the uncanny as well as a discomfort caused by their similarity, their confident gaze, and the ambiguous setting in many of the paintings. The double is a threatening presence in these images because of its associations with violence, unstable identity, and death. My paintings satisfy this feeling, though the sisters do not attack each other or promise future violent action. The sister's relationship is more

[170] Ibid., n p
[171] Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy,* 65–66.

complicated I think: they are sisters, as my sister and I are. But, they are perhaps complete identicals (doubles) as well. Though they do not look at each other, I think they are aware of each other. Perhaps they could be, as *The Two Fridas* are (figure 9), two versions of one identity. The presence of animals in much of my work encourages a complex read that references fairy tales and folktales, where sightings of animals in the woods could mean allyship or death.

9. Woods and Wolves; Copses and Corpses

I asked Saint Christopher
To find your sister
And she ran out in the woods
And she ran out in the woods

"The Woods" by Elena Tonra

The idea of 'the woods' or 'the forest' has made its presence known in my work. In my drawings as well as paintings there is a significant lack of architecture. The places the twins occupy, though informed by reference to flora and images of trees, are highly imaginary. 'The woods' or 'the forest' are places of note in many fairy tales and folktales. The forest or woods focus the story as a place of possibility and of fear.

My sister and I used to play in the groupings of trees in Fishing Lake, Saskatchewan, pretending that we were in an enchanted forest. Tight small copses of birch and aspen shut out the highway and the noise of swimmers and boats by the lakeshore. When the water levels in the lake rose drastically, many of the trees which led from cabin down to the shore drowned. I've always thought there was something perverse in the idea of a tree drowning: an excess of resources, spilling out of the tree's body until it suffocates from the lack of reprieve. There were less 'woods' to play in afterwards. Undeterred, my sister and I, sometimes accompanied by a friend, also played down by the Saskatchewan River. We'd run through the trees, beginning on Sask. Crescent or down towards the bank, until with a thick slap our feet met pavement—a walking path, Meewasin Trail. If others were around, people walking their dogs or cycling, we would abruptly stop our fanciful play, and wait until they moved on. The game always returned once we left the path. It was too embarrassing to draw attention in public— and was distinctly *non*-magical to play the game on pavement. At home, in our parent's backyard, we climbed the small crabapple tree and pretended that our family dog— a large black Bouvier de Flanders

named Angus— was a fierce wolf. Even in parks we often neglected the playground for bushes and shrubs. The playground afforded certain imaginary possibilities: it could be a fortress, for example. More often than not, the fortress was also the enemy of us, the children who lived in the forest and were friends with animals.

Figure 19: *Sylvain* by Maia Stark, oil on canvas, 4.4x6 feet, 2014

I cannot pinpoint where this forest-child preoccupation came from, probably movies and books, but to this day I am still compelled by the concept of the woods, the forest. Many folktales and fairytales revolve around the forest as a place of fear and magic. The edge of the woods is, like a body of water, a boundary or threshold between known world and unknown world. To enter the woods is to open yourself to danger and wonder: animals talk, the trees whisper, and witches make cunning promises.

Figure 20: *We Are Made of Little Bones* by Maia Stark, charcoal on Stonehenge, 3.5x5 feet, 2013

In *We Are Made of Little Bones* (figure 20) I wanted to base a drawing on fairytale and folktale motifs. I knew I wanted to draw a pair of twin girls in a forest, and I wanted there to be a sense of 'here,' and 'there.' The girls face an expanse of water, which moves into a path between dark rows of trees. A fallen over trunk lays near them, juxtaposing the upright lit girls who sit astride a dog each. 'Dogs' *seems* a proper word choice, though I would consider them 'dog-like beasts' rather than specific to an animal. The black dogs, in *We Are Made of Little Bones* and a dog's presence in other pieces, such as *Sylvain* (figure 19) and *Little Golden, Riddled, Sever* (figure 22) is the only other prominent figure which appears in my work outside of the twin girls. The black dog is a psychopomp: a guardian of the 'liminal' zone at the boundaries of worlds—a guide on the path to the underworld.[172] Many mythologies across various cultures interact with

[172] Bob Trubshaw, "Black Dogs: Guardians of the Corpse ways," *At The Edge,* no. 20 (1994): http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/bdogs.htm.

the idea of dogs as gatekeepers or else as guides: Hellhounds populate Greek, Indic, Celtic, Germanic, Latin, Armenian and Iranian sources.[173] In Egypt the dog—or jackal— headed Anubis acts as psychopomp and divine embalmer; dogs are closely linked with Greek goddess Hecate (occasionally depicted as dog-headed) and Hecate's companion pet is in fact the dog Kerberos, the watchdog at the entrance to Hades; the Celtic Hounds of Annwn were considered death omens, sent out to seek corpses and human souls for consumption; Greyhound dogs are presented to the lord of the underworld in early Welsh literature; and in Vedic mythology of ancient India, the deceased must "pass by the four-eyed dogs of Yama, King of the Dead."[174] Folklore and mythology is rich with the presence of dogs as guardians of spirits, gatekeepers to the world of the dead, or else as companions to the dying— there is certainly an extensively described connection between dogs and the realm of the dead. This connection is, according to some, attributed to the hunting role of dogs: their role in human society is inextricably connected to predatoriness and death.[175] The association of dogs with the afterlife is also attributed to the practice of predatory canines, such as dogs, wolves and foxes, eating corpses. According to Bruce Lincoln, author of *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, the association of dogs or wolves and the underworld may be due to animal's widespread reputation as a scavenger of corpses:[176] the dog possesses "the greed of none other than all-devouring

[173] Ibid., n.p.

[174] Ibid., n.p.

[175] Ibid., n.p.

[176] Ibid., n.p.

death."[177] The concept of black phantom dogs or "Grims" permeates folklore and has continued to effect popular future. The detective character Sherlock Holmes famously attends to the problem of a phantom black dog in Sir Conan Arthur Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles."

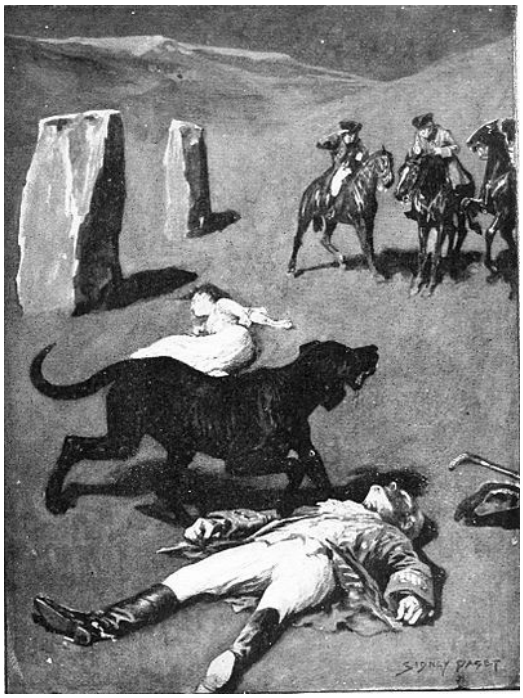

Figure 21: *There in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen*, illustration for chapter II of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sidney Paget (archive.org).

The hound of death is even present in the widely popular teen fiction series *Harry Potter* by J.K Rowling: the main character, in the third book of the series, is concerned after seeing a large black dog over a period of months. Students and teachers alike warn him about the appearance—

[177] Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*, (Chicago, 1991), 100, quoted in Alby Stone, "Hellhounds, Werewolves, and the Germanic Underworld," *At the Edge,* no. 20 (1994), http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/hellhnds.htm.

"[t]he giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen—the worst omen—of death!"[178]

In *Sylvain* (figure 19), the black dog and twin girls are surrounded by rabbits. The rabbits are lying down, and it is my intention that it remains unclear whether the rabbits are resting or dead (perhaps through action of the children or dog). The presence of the rabbits, and the two wasps on the left side of the painting, is also inspired by the aforementioned memory of my sister and I finding the dead rabbits in the pen. The association of predatoriness of the dog, and the reproductive capabilities of the rabbits present opposing forces: death and life. Such forces are manifested in the animals and surround the young girls who calmly regard the audience. Whether or not the dog has been tamed by the girls is unknown, just as the state of the rabbits is unclear. Occasionally, myths featuring the more generic "hellhounds" describe pairs of dogs: "One being the dog of life and the other the dog of death, serving to carry off one about to die, while the former can restore him or her to life."[179] In Armenian mythology, for example, one hound is named "Spitake," "The White," and the other hound is named "Siaw," "The Black"— the hound of death.[180] The dualistic description of pairs of hounds reflects the dualistic division of doubles: one subject, the subject of life and of *self*, is in opposition to its double, the dark subject who brings death— and in death, ends the "self." The use of rabbits in my work speaks to prey, transition, otherworldliness, and reproduction, as well as personal memory. The dog, while

[178] J.K Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999) 82–83.

[179] Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice,* qtd by Trubshaw, n.p.

[180] Trubshaw, "Black Dogs: Guardians of the Corpse ways," n.p.

intending to be a psychopomp in the paintings, is also based out of memory: specifically, childhood memories of religion and death.

10. Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

When I was about 10 years old—when my sister and I were about 10 years old— we attended a catholic elementary school. This was our first formal introduction to religion. Previously I was aware that there was a thing called religion and that it had to do with God. However, I had never attended mass, was not baptized, and did not pray. The first year we attended this catholic school my sister and I were immediately given handouts of prayers to memorize and a small red bible each. In Religion class and at mandatory school masses I learned about heaven and hell. Over the few years I spent at that elementary school, I pored over the sections describing hell and damnation in my little red bible. A fervour seemed to have taken hold of me, as I remember it. I was never vocal about how this religious influence affected me— I slept with my bible under my pillow and would hide it if my mother or father came in the room. They did not know that I was reading it so devoutly. This fervour was quite directly in relation to my fear of death. My religion class had worried me as to what "life after death" meant, and I slept with the bible trying to take comfort in its presence. I could see, in the darkness from the bunk-bed which I shared with my twin sister—my sleeping head four inches of fluff away from my little red bible— a cross stitch which hung on our bedroom wall. Our Granny, or perhaps a well-meaning friend of our Granny's, had sewn it and given it to us.

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray thee Lord my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake
I pray thee lord my soul to take

I read the cross-stitch almost every night and I prayed and prayed that I wouldn't die in my sleep and go to hell. I also worried that I wouldn't go to heaven or hell; that death meant *nothing*. Though I tried to be good, I was doubtful of the idea of heaven. I would imagine dying in car crashes, or dying in the hospital while alone, or falling down while walking through the door—

as my grandfather died, one day after picking up groceries. I think part of my preoccupation with death was due to three of my grandparents, my friend's father, and our family dog all dying while we attended this school. Angus, the Bouvier de Flanders, was "full of cancer," my Bompa fell down a flight of stairs and died in the hospital, my Ama had a blood disorder, my Granddad collapsed in the door of his apartment, and my friend's father had a brain tumour. I was scared that I could die at any time, and I worried about what would happen if I left my sister alone, or if she left me alone— and so I'd breath into my pillow at night, and pray until I fell asleep.

Figure 22: *Little Golden, Riddled, Sever* by Maia Stark, various media on vellum, wood, electronics 2014

In the piece *Little Golden, Riddled, Sever*, I aimed to explore how memory constructs images. Drawing and painting on different pieces of vellum, I drew inspiration from various memories (present and past) to construct a narrative that, I thought, told the story of a childhood fascination and fear of death. I drew the aspen and elm trees from Fishing Lake, Saskatchewan; I drew my

sister and I from photographs (filling in our bodies with ink to create silhouettes); I drew the same dead dog three or four times; and I drew a red sweater that belonged to my Ama. Using the lightboxes, I played with varying the construction of trees with dog with children with sweater, until I was satisfied with the finished triptych. The twins, in this piece, are perhaps darker in mood than the paintings I have made. Their interaction with the dog in the middle lightbox is slightly disturbing, particularly if the dog is indeed dead. The translation of their suspended, almost floating, bodies into silhouettes, too, enhances a discomforting atmosphere.

When I left elementary school I left behind the act of prayer. I don't consider myself a religious person anymore. At the request of teachers and peers, I had gone through the motions of religious activity but this participation was shallow— I had never quite understood or committed to the idea of religion. A fear of death kept a bible under my pillow: that was my assurance against death when I was a child. Now, however, I have a much more ambivalent relationship with the idea of death. This relationship changes, however, as I experience death among friends and family, and as I myself get older. Despite my attempt to reconcile the idea that one day I will die, I am still preoccupied with the idea of dying without my sister.

11. Death, Melancholia, and Abjection

When I think about myself dying one day, as I know I will, I am reminded of stories of twins who die together or die apart. The knowledge of my mortality is inextricably connected to the consideration of my sister's mortality. Media sources find this connection particularly fascinating. When Vivian Brown of the twin personalities Marian and Vivian Brown passed away in September of 2008, the city of San Francisco itself seemed to mourn.[181] The Brown twins were renowned in San Francisco: local personalities, they dressed completely identical, even to the angle of their hats or to the presence of a decorative broach.[182]

Figure 23: Marian and Vivian Brown, photographed by Mike Kepka (San Francisco Chronicle).

The New York Daily News article reporting Vivian's death notes that Marian, 85 years old, stated she would be trying to bolster her savings so that she may be buried next to her sister, so

[181] David Knowles, "One of San Francisco's Flamboyant Brown Twins Dies in Sleep," *New York Daily News,* January 11, 2013, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/famed-san-francisco-twin-vivian-brown-dies-article-1.1238588.

[182] Ibid., n.p.

that they can be together again.[183] The death of identical twins is particularly open to attention from the media, and various newspapers report stories of twin deaths either as fascination or in an attempt to describe the ineffable loss of one's twin.

Twin brothers Ismail and Suleyan Cata died together in a Turkish mine disaster last May that claimed 301 other lives.[184] The article focusing on the death of these two people, "Turkish Mine Disaster: twins were born together, wed together, and died holding hands," highlights the horror and tragedy of the mine explosion but focuses specifically on twin brothers Ismail and Suleyan, who "had been through so much together, sharing the type of special bond that only identical twins can."[185] Though I don't mean to criticize a news source for focusing on and naming specific victims of a terrible disaster, there is an undeniable presence of *fascination* or even morbid *sensationalism* with the twins and their 'twinness' in particular: their deaths are portrayed as especially remarkable. Aside to this fascination is the very real sense of loss and grief: the twice mentioned detail[186] of the twins holding hands in their last moments makes the story considerably heart-rending, while also drawing attention to their 'twin connection.' This attention to the physical touch of twins reminds me of the various artworks I have considered thus far: Diane Arbus's *Identical Twins* (figure 6) touch hands, *The Two Fridas* (figure 9) hold hands, Chassériau's *The Two Sisters* grasp arms, and my sisters in both *Over, Done With, Gone*

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[183] Ibid.,

[184] Andy Lines, "Turkish Mine Disaster: twins were born together, wed together, and died holding hands," *The Mirror,* May 17, 2014, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/turkish-mine-disaster-twins-were-3558966.

[185] Ibid., n.p.

[186] Ibid.,

(figure 4) and *The Sisters and the Thistle* (figure 17) have a physical connection and touch through legs and arms.

To consider one's future death is no easy thing: not only are we dismayed at the prospect of no longer living, but we must also consider the state of our body and its eventual movement from subject and self to object and corpse. The "abject" threatens a disintegration of meaning between subject and object, between self and other. Though the concept of death is a macabre topic, I do not consider such ideas depressing. Rather, I think the conception of death and the atmosphere in much of my work is melancholic.

Though 'melancholy' has traditionally been linked to its origins as a dark humor, black bile causing sullenness, ill temper and sever depression,[187] the most contemporary uses of the word and its definition are aligned with introspection and reflection: "Tender, sentimental, or reflective sadness; . . . sentimental reflection, etc., or as a source of aesthetic pleasure."[188] Each painting or drawing in my MFA exhibit has, I think, a sense of quietness to it that fosters reflection and a slow visual reading. The twin girls themselves seem melancholic in attitude; they regard the viewer and repose in passive positions. It is tempting to associate the emotion of melancholy with depression, as its early uses and associations linked the two. However, I think that the melancholy attitude of the girls and the emotion provoked in the audience is based in self-reflection rather than fear or inexpressible sadness. Emily Brady and Arto Haapala describe, in their essay "Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion," how melancholia has a distinctive nature:

[187] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v."melancholy," Oxford University Press, http://oed.com.

[188] Ibid.,

melancholy involves the pleasure of reflection and contemplation of longing,[189] whereas sadness or misery is unbearable and depression leads to a numbing of feelings which leads one to lose the ability to reflect. Fittingly, for the themes I have discussed this far across doubles and twins, melancholy has a dual nature.[190] According to Brady and Haapala there are negative and positive aspects in melancholy that alternate, creating contrasts and rhythms of pleasure.[191] These aspects combine with the reflectivity that is at the heart of melancholy, and the particular refined feeling of the emotion."[192] Melancholy can involve contemplation, reflection and distancing, as well as a sort of grieving or mourning.[193] Other emotions can be involved, such as sadness, love, longing, and even dread— "each of these emotions may be a response to either a whole narrative or aspects of it."[194] In *SelfSame*, melancholy is experienced in the attraction to the image of the double; the longing for companionship that doubles seem to represent; the dread of mortality represented by Freud's double; and the black dog (psychopomp); and the woods and the water, gates between this world and the Otherworld.

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[189] Emily Brady and Arto Haapala, "Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion," *Contemporary Aesthetics,* http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=214.

[190] Ibid., n.p.

[191] Ibid.,

[192] Ibid.,

[193] Ibid.,

[194] Ibid.,

The concept of death in its most material sense— as a corpse— is the utmost in "abjection,"[195] according to theorist Julia Kristeva. In the essay *Powers of Horror* Kristeva describes the corpse as "death infecting life . . . Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us."[196] When confronted with a corpse we are forced to respond to the inevitable corruption of our own bodies: everything the ideal classical body attempts to hide (orifices, blood, excrement, bloating, excess, and decay). The corpse reminds us of our materiality, the body of which Western philosophical ideologies were so eager to have us transcend from. Abjection, then, is primarily concerned with societal anxieties surrounding the body and the repulsion that arises from exposure to bodily excretions like blood and pus. Encounters with the abject, similar to encounters with our double, jeopardize both the personal and collective identity, as they "threaten the border of the subject and are accompanied by feelings of loss and loneliness."[197] In order to escape the attraction of dangerous otherness, the individual must reject the abject and define and defend the boundaries of the self. When characters in stories encounter their double the result is often a struggle—in rejecting the double, we affirm our identity. Similarly, subjects of the grotesque are also rejected due to their dangerous otherness.

The grotesque and the abject appear related, especially when considering how contemporary theorists have expanded Kristeva's concept into social theory. Iris Marion Young,

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[195] Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection," translated by Leon S. Roudiez, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/RuttkayVeronika/Kristeva_-_powers_of_horror.pdf, 4.

[196] Ibid.,

[197] Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller, introduction to *The Abject of Desire: The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, ed. Konstanze Kutzbach (NY: Rodopi, 2007), 9.

for example, draws attention to how marginalized groups, such as people of colour and homosexual people, often are "victims of a body aesthetic that defines some groups as ugly or fearsome and produces reactions in relation to members of these groups." [198] This abject reaction to certain groups (which causes those dominant oppressors to reject the abject and define themselves against it) includes those persons who have been traditionally defined as grotesque. The corpse and the double, in particular, provoke horror and repulsion paired with a fear of death. We can imagine the double now as suggestive of death: to see your double and to have knowledge of your mortality is to imagine looking up on your own death, your own corpse—as Narcissus gazed at himself or his sister, he either ensured his death in his gaze, or else mourned the death of his other half. Even if one's exact double does not slander or attack you, as it does in "William Wilson" or *Black Swan,* the presence of the double still creates an uncanny sensation as our mind wrestles with their imaginable and yet inexplicable presence. The grotesque, the uncanny, and the abject are not necessarily the same in regards to their aesthetics or required environments, but they still present as related: dark triplets who associate themselves with non-normative practices that trace back to a fear of death.

[198] Ibid.,

Figure 24: *Unbecoming* by Maia Stark, oil on canvas, 4x6 feet, 2014

Figure 25: *Unbecoming*, detail, by Maia Stark, oil on canvas, 2014.

In my painting *Unbecoming*, the previous references to folktales and mythology are absent. The focus is on the twin girls, their similarities and differences. Though originally working from a series of photographs, I abandoned them soon after setting up the underpainting, hoping to accomplish a sense of awkwardness and coarseness in the depiction of the sisters. The twin girls in *Unbecoming*, as in with *Over, Done With, Gone* (see figure 4), appear to be of an indeterminate age between youth and adulthood. In order to push this painting further away from direct representation, I depicted the figures' legs with a strange scale-like rash. The scales or bumps on their legs place this particular painting into the realm of the female grotesque, their presence as twins further made repulsive with abnormal skin reminiscent of reptilian animals. This painting is the last one begun as part of this series and appears to return, full circle, back to my initial research on the female grotesque.

The female grotesque, the uncanny, and abject all encompass an aesthetic of unattractive qualities and emotions. While my work is not grotesque or abject in each aesthetics' most definitive forms, the depictions of female coded bodies are nonetheless *essentialized* as grotesque in not only their femaleness, but also their twinness. My work highlights and embodies a multitude of uncanny elements: the depiction of female coded grotesque bodies; conjoined bodies; the suspect presence of twins and animals; and finally, the duality of life and death within the double, creates a subtly uncomfortable and melancholic atmosphere.

12. Concluding Remarks

Visions of twins and doubles have held fascination across cultures and through time as biological phenomenon, spiritual conundrum, and unsettling terror. This discomfort is due to the uncanny similarity between twins, our struggle to differentiate and identify them, and is influenced by a rich history of stories and superstitions. That which is designated as uncanny is relegated to the margins—such experiences belong to the realm of the unknown and undesirable. The grotesque is related to the uncanny in this way, pushed to the margins, delegated as abnormal, and designated as *abject*. The grotesque body, specifically the female body, is associated with degradation, filth, death and rebirth.[199] Just as the uncanny double evokes horror at the prospect of death, the doubled female body appears to promise endless reproduction and repetition.

Like children abandoned in a fairy-tale, the sisters in *SelfSame* are entirely alone: no sense of time or architecture is insinuated in the image. I think that the nature of my sister and I's relationship fosters melancholic tidings in itself. The presence of a constant companion prompts the consideration of their eventual absence. Not only have I thought about and dreaded the death of my sister, but also I have had similar thoughts about my partner. Occasionally these thoughts turn to anxiety, and I worry about how I will receive the news of their death. Other times, my mood is distinctly melancholic as I reflect on such relationships more fully and I can imagine, without depressive sadness, a future of solitude. Though the particular relationship of twins may offer, at least in friendship, a sense of wholeness or completeness which many desire, the inevitable absence of such a companion promises an ineffable grief and reminder of one's own impermanence.

[199] Russo, *The Female Grotesque,* 8.

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